# PastForward

Autumn 2010

Considering the Role of **Testimony** On Oral & Video Testimony BY YEHUDA BAUER

Returning to Rwanda by donald E. Miller A Conversation with Steven Spielberg & Renée Firestone

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Above, clockwise from left: Yehuda Bauer, Professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Renée Firestone, Holocaust survivor; Fidele Nzabakira, Rwandan genocide survivor

## Strong New Leadership

NEW APPOINTMENTS within the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Board of Councilors will bring three individuals with outstanding records of achievement into *new positions of leadership*.



Above, left to right: Robert J. Katz, Chair of the Board; Susan Crown, and Harry Robinson, Board's Vice Chairs. Visit college.usc.edu/vhi/ leadership to view a full list of the Institute's Board of Councilors. **Howard Gillman**, Dean of USC College of Letters, Arts & Sciences, has appointed Robert J. Katz as Chair of the Institute's Board of Councilors, and Susan Crown and Harry Robinson as Vice Chairs.

**Robert J. Katz** has been a driving force behind the growth and achievements of the Institute since its early years as the Shoah Foundation. When the Foundation finished collecting testimony in 1999, Katz helped the organization evolve into an institution where the testimonies would find new life and purpose through their educational use. He served as Chair of the Development Committee, and he was instrumental in moving the organization to the University of Southern California, where the archive has found a permanent home and the Foundation became the USC Shoah Foundation Institute.

"It has been a rare privilege—the best combination of responsibility, purpose, and joy to have been actively associated with the Shoah Foundation Institute and its predecessor foundation for well over a decade," Katz said. "I was humbled to be asked by USC to chair the Institute's Board of Councilors, and to know that the idea had been endorsed by Steven Spielberg. We expect to continue on the strategic paths we adopted and have refined over the past 18 months, with the leadership team of Stephen Smith and Kim Simon executing transformational initiatives, particularly in the field of secondary-school Holocaust and genocide education, under the oversight of Dean Howard Gillman and with the assistance of the Board of Councilors."

**Susan Crown** became involved with the Shoah Foundation in 1997. She assumed various leadership roles, including chairing the Board of Directors from 2002–2005 and serving on the Development Committee. During her term as Chair, Crown played a critical role in moving the Foundation and its archive to USC.

"Very rarely are we offered opportunities to do something that literally helps to shape history," she said. "The Institute allows us all to be firsthand witnesses to the worst and the best in human beings, and its archive offers remarkable opportunities to teach and to learn."

As a member of the Shoah Foundation's Board of Directors in 2001, **Harry Robinson** helped lead the effort to sharpen and implement its worldwide educational mission. His guidance proved equally essential to integrating the organization into USC and developing its 2008 strategic plan and the initiatives that have resulted from it.

"The educational use of testimony is enriching students' learning experiences, deepening our knowledge of history, and carrying a message of tolerance and hope across generations," Robinson said. "I am honored to be involved with the Institute at such a pivotal time and am enthusiastic about the linkages that are developing between USC and the Institute."

"The Institute has benefited from the guidance and expertise of Bob Katz, Susan Crown, and Harry Robinson for many years," said Executive Director Stephen D. Smith. "Their new roles will help to ensure that the survivors and other witnesses who entrusted their memories to us will become teachers of humanity; whose faces are seen, whose voices are heard, and whose life stories will touch future generations."

# Considering the Role of Testimony

By Stephen D. Smith So why do we take TESTIMONY? That's the theme we are addressing in this issue of *PastForward*.

> The USC Shoah Foundation Institute's collection includes about 52,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors and other witnesses. Many of these testimonies were given in some way or other to commemorate loved ones, communities, and ways of life that may otherwise be forgotten. The contributors also gave the names of 1.2 million individuals to the Visual History Archive; these are the names of parents, grandparents, siblings, and extended family, many of whom did not survive the Holocaust. In their absence, their names have become memorials in their own right. So the testimonies stand as **narrative memorials**.

> Many survivors have reported that in the camps, they wanted to survive to "tell the world." This might seem easy to say after the fact; but the diaries and notes of the *Sonderkommando* in Birkenau, and the testimony of other Jewish survivors, attest to the fact that even under seemingly hopeless conditions, people were determined to survive to bear witness for those who could not. The testimonies fulfill that promise and provide the **eyewitness accounts** they said they would give.

> Though not every detail of a person's life can be recalled with absolute clarity, there's no question that testimony provides material of immense historical significance. They are **living documents** containing dates, places, and people. But unlike a paper document, testimony is not two dimensional and fixed. On one hand, that makes it more difficult for the historians who must try to make sense of reflection, emotion, and nuances that a document doesn't provide. On the other hand, testimony can be regarded as rich source material not meant to replace, but to



sit alongside the other forms of source material with which we have to work.

When the Holocaust survivor says "beware of the dangers of hatred," **they are challenging** the viewer to be self reflective. It's interesting to note that in their testimonies, the survivors are not always direct in their challenge. Rather, they share episodes from their lives that have a point or moral to which they expect the viewer to respond. Their point may be about the importance of family, or security, or resistance, or hope. They may want us to consider the dangers of making a hasty judgment; they may challenge us to think about choices. Testimony is as much about the response of the viewer as it is about the content of the testimony itself.

Holocaust survivor testimony is not primarily about death, but rather about overcoming death. The very fact that the survivor is in front of the camera indicates that they overcame the odds. Testimony, then, is about living through. The Yiddish term for survival *iberleben*—to live over—takes that literally. The very presence of survivors onscreen attests to the resilience of the human spirit, the basic ability to endure unimaginable suffering and loss, and then continue to create homes and families and new generations, to set new goals and aspirations. The fact that survivors testify is in itself a **form of hope**—despite humanity's huge failing.

Testimony is never one thing. It gives the chance for each individual to remember the past as an eyewitness. It provides much-needed historical data about what actually happened to individuals, and how those experiences changed the course of their lives and shaped their perspectives. It also challenges us as human beings, to give us the hope we need to continue our work, in spite of everything we know about humanity. In this issue of *PastForward*, we explore testimony from these perspectives to listen more closely to what survivors are trying to say and why.

## Voices from the Archive

Nearly 52,000 Holocaust survivors and other witnesses gave their testimonies to the Institute, from 56 countries and in 32 languages. The archive is filled with more than 100,000 hours of unique life stories. It would take more than 12 years to watch every person's testimony, and it would be impossible to share all of their stories in PastForward. Here is a brief glimpse into the lives of three survivors: Mayer Adler, Stefan Kosinski, and Julia Lentini. We invite you to view their entire testimonies on our website at college.usc.edu/vhi/voicesfromthearchive.



#### Mayer Adler

Jewish Survivor, Born in Berezovo, Czechoslovakia, October 6, 1929 Interviewed in English by Merle Goldberg, Worcester, MA, May 21, 1995 Interview Length 2:21:29

It was not always luck; decisions had to be made in a split second. Sometimes they were physical choices, other times they were moral ones.

"It seemed like the sky was filled with them," Mayer Adler said, calling to mind a day in 1939 when German warplanes flew over Berezovo, Czechoslovakia. He was 10 years old. "Soon after this happened... there were carriages coming through our town. People were escaping from Poland... I didn't connect [that] this was going to be happening to us [one day]."

The Jews of Berezovo lived relatively freely during the war, until 1944; it was then that preparations were made to send them to the ghetto in nearby Iza. This presented the Adler family with a dilemma: Would they have a better chance of survival if they stayed together or if they went separate ways? Fifteen-year-old Mayer wanted to escape east and head towards the Soviet area. His mother and two younger brothers would comply with the Nazi order and go to the ghetto. His father would go with them, but asked Mayer not to leave. The next day he left to head east anyway. There waiting on the street was a gentile whom his father had paid to escort him safely. They did not get beyond the nearby mountains, where they lived in the forest for several weeks. To his surprise, Mayer then came across his father and younger brother who had also escaped the deportation to the Iza ghetto. Three of the five had chosen to live on the mountain despite separation. Then the Nazis used blackmail. They made it known in the area that if there were escapees in the forest who had family members in the ghetto, they would kill the family in the ghetto. Uncertain about the truth of this threat, Mayer, his father, and brother, decided to hand themselves in. They were taken to the Iza ghetto, where they were reunited with Mayer's mother and other brother.

Shortly thereafter, the ghetto population was deported to Auschwitz.

Another decision saved his life in Auschwitz. He was on a work detail, and one thousand prisoners were selected to be transferred out of Auschwitz. "We knew that they were going to be loaded on a train and shipped someplace, and this looked too inviting to me," Mayer said. "It was a sunny day—I think it must have been the end of July—and they were asking for water." Mayer began bringing them water, which brought him close enough to switch places with a young man. Ironically the

"Every so often I think, 'What I wouldn't do to spend an hour or two with my parents,' or if I had a brother who survived— I would give almost anything to be with them." young man wanted to stay behind to be with his brother. This time, someone else was choosing to stay in solidarity with his family. Mayer boarded a train in his place, out of Auschwitz, to a much less grueling regime in Landshut.

After his liberation from

Dachau on April 29, 1945, Mayer returned to Berezovo hoping to be reunited with his parents and younger brothers. When he got to his house, he found people living there who had once been neighbors; he was the only survivor in his family. The decision to surrender for the sake of his mother was a big decision. It took him to Auschwitz. He knows that family was the most important thing of all. "Every so often I think, 'What I wouldn't do to spend an hour or two with my parents,' or if I had a brother who survived—I would give almost anything to be with them," he said.



Top row, from left: Jenna Adler, daughter-in-law; Daniel Adler, son; Ronald Adler, son; Heather Robinson, daughter-in-law. Bottom row, from left: Benjamin Adler, grandson; Loretta Adler, wife; Mayer Adler; and Joshua Adler, grandson



#### Stefan Kosinski

Homosexual Survivor, Born Torun, Poland, January 1, 1925 Interviewed in English by Klaus Muller, Los Angeles, Nov 14, 1995 Interview Length 3:01:57

Stefan Kosinski was born in Torun, Poland, in 1925 into a Catholic family. He was a teenager when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, and he worked for a

time at a theater near his home during the occupation. One night in 1941, when Stefan was on his way home from the theater after work, he noticed a young soldier watching him. He was afraid, until the soldier smiled at him. That was how Stefan met Willi, a soldier from Austria with whom he quickly fell in love.

Though Stefan and Willi began spending time together, their relationship would be short-lived; Willi had to leave Poland in 1942, and Stefan remembered the day Willi told him they could no longer see each other. "'I must leave you...tomorrow I am going to the Eastern Front, to Russia.' And I'd heard that this Russia[n] front was the worst," Stefan said. "Very few soldiers ever returned."

Willi promised to write as soon as he could. "I was waiting for his letter. I never received his letter...I thought...maybe he couldn't write; maybe I will write to him. Maybe it will be a great pleasure, a great joy to him.' And I did it."

In September 1942, Stefan was told to report to the local office of the Gestapo. There, he was brought before an official who had possession of the letter he'd written to Willi. "He said, 'This is your letter, yes?' I said yes; I couldn't lie. It was my letter. 'You have written this letter to a German soldier?' 'Yes, I did.' ...I knew that I will stay there, that I am no [longer] free; I will never go home to my mother; I will never go home..."

"I was waiting for his letter. I never received his letter...I thought... maybe he couldn't write; maybe I will write to him. Maybe it will be a great pleasure, a great joy to him.' And I did it." Stefan was detained and forced to do labor at a prison in Stuhm (Sztum), Germany, then sent to a concentration camp in Graudenz (Grudziadz), Poland. In the winter of 1945, the prisoners were forced on a death march as Allied forces approached. "For two weeks we went by foot," he said. "[If] you fell, you were frozen—you would be finished." The march ended at a prison in Hanover, Ger-

many, where Stefan remained until he escaped in May 1945, just before liberation.

Stefan lived in a German displaced persons camp until his return to Poland in 1947. "This was five years taken from my life," he said. "For what? I didn't kill. I didn't steal. I did nothing wrong."

After the war, Stefan had a strong desire to share his story. "I wanted to show the world how I suffered for nothing." After many years, he was approached by author Lutz Van Dijk, who wrote about Stefan's relationship with Willi. Damned Strong Love was published in 1995. That same year, Stefan gave his testimony to the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, as one of the six homosexual survivors of Nazi persecution in the Visual History Archive. Willi's fate is still unknown.



#### Julia Lentini

Sinti-Roma (Gypsy) Survivor, Born in Eisern, Germany, April 15, 1926 Interviewed in English by Liane Herbst, Hemet, California, Nov 12, 1995 Interview Length 3:06:32

Julia Lentini (née Julia Backer) was born in Eisern, Germany, in 1926, one of 15 children born into a family that was part of an estimated 30,000 Roma living in

Germany prior to the Second World War. She remembered that her family was very close-knit, and that her early childhood was safe and happy. Julia described how they would travel "grenze to grenze"—from border to border—on their wagons; during the summer, they would sleep under the stars. "We [thought we] had no reason to fear," Julia said, thinking back on when Hitler came to power. Ten years later, things changed dramatically. "[It] was March 8, 1943... Somebody knocked on the door, and it was the burgermeister (the town mayor) ... He said, 'There are some authorities out here. They've surrounded your house...they have to bring your family in... There's something about your family tree—they're checking your family tree,

"I thought I wasn't capable of loving anymore, anybody," she said. But there in Biedenkopf, Julia met Henry Lentini, an American soldier. Eight months later they were married, and in 1946, Julia moved with Henry to the United States. and you'll probably be gone for about three or four days.' My mother said, 'Hold hands. Stay together.' "

Julia and her family were taken from their home in Biedenkopf and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. "We got there at night...all those bright lights-lights, from everywhere...the children were screaming, and sleepy, and crying. What they were doing, they were putting the numbers on us. They wouldn't put us in

any blocks until you had this number business. So they started with the numbers first. Then, the worst thing...you strip... Here's my mother... All she had to say was 'Stay together, kids. Stay together.' That was the beginning of the end for her." Julia's mother, father, and oldest sister died of typhoid fever shortly after. Her brother William was taken away around the same time and never heard from again. On August 2, 1944, the Nazis liquidated the Zigeunerlager, the Roma section of Auschwitz, killing 2,897 people. Julia was one of the survivors.

In early 1945, Julia was separated from her surviving family members and sent to the Schlieben labor camp. After Russian soldiers liberated the camp in 1945, she returned to Biedenkopf. "I thought I wasn't capable of loving anymore, anybody," she said. But there in Biedenkopf, Julia met Henry Lentini, an American soldier. Eight months later they were married, and in 1946, Julia moved with Henry to the United States.

"I'm really glad [to give] this interview—that this somehow, somewhere, will help... Never again should this happen to anyone...I don't care who...not one." Of 23,000 gypsies incarcerated in Auschwitz Birkenau, 21,000 were murdered. Julia is one of 407 Sinti-Roma survivors who gave their testimony to the Visual History Archive.

## Holocaust History on a Human Scale

The power of testimony as an educational tool at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. By David G. Marwell

Photo by Melanie Einzig

While not all of us have been trained to read historical documents and extract from them all they have to tell us about the events they describe or have set in motion, we all know how to read people. Each of us, to a greater or lesser extent, is equipped to evaluate testimony; indeed, the criminal justice system in many countries is based on the confidence that ordinary people have the innate capacity to hear and evaluate what others say. From the moment of birth, we begin to distinguish how others present themselves: We hear and assess expressions, tone of voice, inflection, and eventually, of course, the literal meaning of what is said. Gradually, we develop a range of sensors to help in our everyday interaction with others, and we learn to rely on our instincts and judgments about people.

It is for these and many other reasons that historical testimony is such an effective educational tool and why we rely so heavily on the power of testimony in our core exhibition at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Twenty-four films punctuate our core exhibition, each one featuring testimony—much of it from the Shoah Foundation Institute. Visitors have the opportunity to experience the first-person narrative of those who lived the history that is being related. In experiencing this narrative, a critical set of receptors is engaged, helping to translate what is said into human terms that speak directly to the viewer.

This powerful medium is most effective not in relating what might be called "big history"—the context of world events and the actions of statesmen and armies—subjects that are perhaps best handled in the museum context by the

curatorial voice, which can synthesize and provide an efficient narrative. But the "small history" —how individuals responded to inhuman conditions, what it felt like to be in a certain situation can be handled in no better way than to allow those who experi-

enced it to speak of it for themselves. Despite the mountains of records that may document a historical event, nothing can replace the human memory for retaining details—even the most mundane details—that can animate history and provide an irreplaceable educational opportunity.

For example, in the museum gallery that deals with children in the Holocaust, the visitor meets several adults who recount their childhood memories: Slava Finkel describes witnessing the shooting death of her mother; and Vera Shaufeld recounts her last image of her parents—a white handkerchief—as she



The "Voices of Liberty" exhibition at the Museum of Jewish Heritage includes Holocaust survivor testimony from the Institute's archive (mjhnyc.org/khc/voices)

boarded a kindertransport train in Prague for her new life in England. Not only can you see the child in the face of the adult, but you can actually feel the effect of these events, reflected in the speaker's voice, the intricate folds around the eye, the angle of the shoulders. There is no more effective or authentic way to relate this history.

Given its sheer power, testimony, like any museum artifact, must be presented with great care. It must be placed in the proper context, and its provenance must be respected. For instance, although the concentration camp experience may have had common elements, it would be wrong to use testimony about one camp to illustrate the history of another. Testimony should not be employed to tell a history that the testifier could not have known at the time. An inmate at Auschwitz, for example, would have been in no position to testify about the decision not to bomb Auschwitz, however moving an Auschwitz survivor might be in illustrating the impact of that decision.

Just as all politics can be said to be local, so all history can be said to be personal. The history of an event is, in some way, the aggregate of the personal histories of those who lived it. By distilling these personal histories and carefully presenting them, we provide a view of an inconceivable history on a human scale, and we enable the public to experience it in the most basic of human ways.

Since 2000, Dr. David G. Marwell has been the director of the Museum of Jewish Heritage - A Living Memorial to the Holocaust (NYC). He is the former Associate Director of the USHMM (D.C.) and served as the Director of the Berlin Document Center. He served as Chief of Investigative Research for the U.S.D.O.J. - OSI. He received a Ph.D. in Modern European History from the State University of New York at Binghamton.

## Beyond Testimony

#### Reciting names, dates, and places misses the point. Why the best interviews are collaborative. By Henry Greenspan

Photo by John Grap

What seems so remarkable now is the fact that we oral historians took so long to realize that what we were involved in was a two-way process.... Too many of us saw the interview as just another source of evidence to be extracted." – Valerie Yow, The Oral History Reader

**Looking back at 35 years** of listening to survivors, I feel lucky to have begun when I did. In the mid-1970s, the relative absence of precedents for interviewing Holocaust survivors allowed me to develop an approach more or less *de novo*, as much as experiment as by design. I assumed, for example, that my own and survivors' experiences in the interviews would suggest, clearly enough, how to proceed. That is indeed what happened. The aspect of my work that has become best known—multiple interviews with the same survivor—was suggested by survivors themselves. With some, those conversations continue today.

The approach that emerged was thus sustained dialogue—not single interviews to "get a testimony." I have learned, however, that the most important factor was not multiple interviews but the quality of the relationship that resulted. Over time, interviews were less my asking questions and survivors providing answers than survivors and I asking the *same* questions: those emerging from a particular survivor's experiences and reflections.

In my view, the best interviews are precisely such collaborative endeavors what I call "knowing *with*" survivors rather than simply "knowing from" or "knowing about" them—and I deliberately worked toward that kind of investigative alliance. For example, I often brought excerpts from earlier interviews to later ones (easy to do with audiotape). Being able, quite literally, to reflect together on what was already a shared creation (the earlier interviews) deepened our collaboration. Agi Rubin, a survivor of Auschwitz and other camps, said about her interviews: "One thought sparks another, and then another, that I may not have even known I had. This is the part that is so gratifying. Whatever I imagine I'm teaching, I'm learning at the same moment. We're learning together." "Learning together" suggests the difference between deepening conversation versus "getting a testimony" in the usual sense.

I have learned that many scholars—especially those who view "testimonies" as "raw data" later to be "cooked" by an expert interpreter—have found a collaborative approach to be challenging. I argue, for example, that the most reliable interpretations emerge *within* interviews—*between* participants working together over time. For those who view interview partners essentially as walking "documents"



places" misses his entire point. "It violates the essence of my experience of the Holocaust; it robs it of what is most important." Rather, a meaningful account of the destruction, says Leon, "... touches on *all* our philosoph-

or "texts," collaborative inquiry represents an entirely different paradigm. Predictably, such practitioners object that they will have to give up their expertise, that they must "privilege" the survivor's perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth. "Learning together" means precisely that: learning *together*. Neither participant gives up anything. On the contrary, each brings everything they know—often everything they are to the conversation. They may or may not agree. Where they do and do not agree is as much the fruit of their dialogue, and often as informative, as any other aspect. And that, too, changes as the dialogue evolves.

The point of this approach, therefore, is not only to meet survivors as participants in, rather than objects of, inquiry. Sustained collaboration also yields more reliable results interpretations that are more nuanced, less arbitrary, and more richly grounded. As a single example, a part of my writing often cited concerns Leon, a survivor who eventually insisted about his recounting: "It is *not* a story. It has to be *made* a story. In order to convey it. And with all the frustration that implies." Typically, the idea of "making a story" of what is "not a story" is attributed to me. Occasionally, it is cited as something "a survivor said" to me. In fact, however, *neither* attribution is correct. Leon's comment emerged over the course of our wrestling together, through several interviews, about the significance of one of his stories. If we had not worked together, and not had several conversations in which to do so, Leon's reflections about "making a story" of what is "not a story" would never have been articulated. It was literally co-authored *through* our collaboration—a result that neither one of us could have predicted beforehand or arrived at alone.

Historians will find assurance in the fact that retelling specific episodes-the who, when, where of particular events—is the part of survivors' accounts that changes least over multiple retellings, even with different interviewers.2 That is because such "micronarratives," small stories, constitute personal memory in its most storable form. But it is also true that only a minority of survivors consider this level of documentation their primary concern.3 The questions survivors ask, and want to discuss, are usually much broader: What does such destruction mean? Where does it leave us? Can it meaningfully be communicated? Survivors' accounts may be "oral history." But they are no less oral philosophy, oral psychology, oral narratology, and more.

Leon makes what stories he can. But he also insists that reciting "names, dates, and

ical questions, *all* the questions of purpose, of right and wrong, of justice, of God. Is a world that permits Auschwitz a proper place to raise a family? Should there even *be* a future? And how does one begin to approach it? How do you even describe it, in any meaningful way?"

Whatever the future for survivors' accounts, if the radical challenges of Leon's questions are not part of it, then not much will be.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Bolkosky, Director of the Voice/Vision Holocaust Archive at University of Michigan-Dearborn, estimates that fewer than one-quarter of survivors represented in the archive are "documentarians" in this specific sense.

Henry Greenspan, a psychologist and playwright at the University of Michigan, has written and taught about the Holocaust for more than 30 years. He is the author of On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony and co-author of Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated. Greenspan also wrote Remnants, a play based on conversations with survivors that has won critical acclaim and more than a dozen awards. In 2000, Greenspan was the annual Weinmann Lecturer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>These issues are explicated in detail in the second edition of my *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony* (St.Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, due 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cf. Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside* a Nazi Slave Labor Camp (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 9.



### For forty years, I've been drawn to the stories of survivors. How I encountered memories of genocide, and why I can't escape them. **Returning to Returning to Returning to By Donald E. Miller**

Portrait by Donald E. Miller

**Genocide.** Until I was 19 years of age, the subject never crossed my mind. Then, during my junior year of college, I met a young woman, Lorna, and fell in love. Both of her parents were survivors of the Armenian genocide, which occurred in 1915-16 in Turkey. On her father's side, only he and one sister survived out of a family of nine. Her mother lost about half her family.

Lorna's mother took to me instantly—serving me huge T-bone steaks, as she thought that was what American boys ate. Her father, on the other hand, was not so certain that he wanted his daughter to marry me. Several years later, when he realized that he had lost the battle, he very cleverly changed tactics, embracing me and inducting me into the community. My mother-in-law was back to serving up shish-kebab, and various forms of eggplant mixed with olive oil and garlic. I was now an integral part of an Armenian family. That was when the stories began to emerge. Lorna's father started talking about his childhood; about the deportations that led to the loss of his family and fellow villagers; about his escape from the home of a Turkish gendarme who had taken his sister as a potential bride; about his life growing up in an orphanage in Greece.

*Medz Hairig*, as our children were later to call him, was a superb storyteller. As I listened, he made me want to know more about what motivated the genocide of a million and a half Armenians. A few years later, Lorna and I launched a small-scale oral history project, interviewing elderly Armenian survivors who lived in our Pasadena neighborhood. We had done about 30 interviews, when I was granted a sabbatical. We went to Cambridge, England, and for six months I read every book I could find on the Armenian genocide. I also researched archival

records from missionaries and other foreigners who were living in Turkey at the time and who had witnessed the atrocities and painted, in increasing detail, a picture of the genocide. In 1993, Lorna and I published *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (University of California Press), which was based on 100 in-depth interviews with immigrant survivors who lived in Southern California.

With the publication of this book, it was now time to move on to more cheerful subjects, which I did—publishing a book several years later on new forms of Pentecostal worship and practice.



our minds. The officers of the organization were university students and had access to the Internet. So we began corresponding. At one point, we asked them whether they might want to duplicate our project of interviewing 100 survivors by doing oral histories with their own members. The students eagerly agreed, and a few months later we found ourselves headed to Rwanda once again, this time loaded with tape recorders, transcribing machines, and hundreds of tapes.

Little did we know that this project would result in a photoessay, an exhibit at the California African American Museum

> near the University of Southern California, and, later, a project on post-traumatic stress with psychologist Beth Meyerowitz. Nor would we have dreamed that we would return another dozen times to Rwanda over the next few years, or that we would launch a new project of interviewing widows and orphans about their experiences of reconciliation and, in some instances, forgiveness of the perpetrators of the genocide.

> Nearly every week we receive emails from Rwanda that begin, "Dear Parents." For Lorna, she sees in these orphans her own father and his struggle for life and dignity. For me, I'm deeply gratified when we (along with various

Other projects unrelated to genocide **(** also filled the decade. But in 2001, Lorna and I were invited to a conference in Kigali, Rwanda, which focused on genocides of the 20th century.

It was during this week in Kigali that we fell in love again—this time, with a group of Rwandan orphans who had

formed an organization to assist each other. They identified with Lorna's story of her father's survival, and they took us into their homes and insisted on telling us their stories of the 1994 genocide, which claimed the lives of at least 800,000 Tutsis.

When we returned home, we could not get these kids out of

**Donald E. Miller** is the Firestone Professor of Religion, Executive Director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, and a professor of religion and sociology at the University of Southern California. He is the author or editor of nine books, including Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement, Armenia: Portraits of Survival and Hope, and Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide. Miller is currently involved in several research projects in Rwanda dealing with experiences of survivors of the 1994 genocide, and he is overseeing a Templeton Foundation research initiative on Global Pentecostalism.

'Never Again" seems to be false, which is why a new generation of scholars needs to be trained to address the age-old crime of humans killing members of their own species.

> friends) are able to assist orphans with their tuition needs; when we can visit the homes of survivors, bringing them a few kilos of rice and beans; and when, after a gut-wrenching interview, we are thanked for recording their account of the genocide.

> Next year, we will finish doing another 100 interviews with survivors. By the time we analyze these interviews and write a book, it will be nearly 20 years since *Survivors* was published. I'm beginning to think that I cannot escape the subject of genocide. Unfortunately, the adage of "Never Again" seems to be false, which is why a new generation of scholars must be trained to address the age-old crime of humans killing members of their own species.

Portrats of Rwandan Tutsi genocide survivors by Donald E. Miller. Page 12: Fidele Nzabakira; this page, from left: Jackline Ntakirutimana, Paskazia Mukasakindi, and Donatien Munyarubuga.

## Notes from Prague

#### By Martin Šmok

How did I start working for the USC Shoah Foundation Institute? It was the mid-1990s, and I was preparing a *documentary film* about the WORKING GROUP of Bratislava, a little-known Jewish rescue group active in Slovakia during World War II.

Aside from his work with the Institute, Martin Šmok, Senior International Program Consultant, scripted the documentary series Among Blind Fools (1993-99) and Between a Star and a Crescent (1999-2003). Other credits include the films Andre's Lives (1997) and Lost Neighbors (2003) and the exhibitions "105" (2005), about visual propaganda, and "Hagibor–the Place, the People, and their Fate" (2008), about a sporting field that served as a Nazi concentration camp and, later, an internment camp for Germans. I had located many witnesses who were still alive around the world; however, I had no funds to travel to interview them. To try to raise interest in the project, I went to every conference on World War II; there were many in Prague at that time.

During this same time, the Shoah Foundation (now the USC Shoah Foundation Institute) set out to interview Holocaust witnesses. Once I learned about its work, I was trained in Amsterdam and became the first Czech interviewer. I also lived in Los Angeles for over two years,



first setting up outreach networks in Central and Eastern Europe, then managing the incoming survivor information and interviewer training. In the process, the witnesses whose memories I wanted to capture gave interviews; their testimonies were included in the Visual History Archive.

In 1997, I left Los Angeles after receiving funding from the Czech government for my film project. After finishing the film, I resumed working for the Shoah Foundation as one of its regional consultants in Europe.

Today, I work for the USC Shoah Foundation Institute in the field. My main task is to support the development of testimony-based classroom materials for use in the Czech Republic and the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The biggest daily challenge I face is conveying who we are and what we do; many think the archive is relevant only for studying or teaching history, or even relevant only when studying Holocaust history. Thus, my challenge lies in helping people to see the depth and breadth of the archive, and in facilitating the understanding that testimony can be used to teach a variety of topics. Furthermore, testimony never works in a vacuum; the experiences documented in the archive must be contextualized so that learners can make sense of them. Part of my role is to provide that context so that the resource can be channelled appropriately.

In January 2010, the Malach Center for Visual History, Europe's third access point to the entire archive, opened at Charles University in Prague. Having access in Prague has been important to me, as the Czech regional consultant. But the work is far from complete; my task is to continue to encourage use of the archive in education and to provide new users with guidance and support.

Some educators are already embracing the idea of using local testimonies to explain the often complicated history of our region. Teachers at our workshops are unlocking the power of individual narrative to shatter years of prejudice and propaganda, and they are becoming aware of the stereotyping and labeling that pervade our daily lives. Only with this knowledge can they help their students to understand the mechanisms of intolerance. The work is endless, but so are the educational opportunities contained within the archive.

Visit the Institute's Czech-language web portal at college.usc.edu/vhi/czech.

COVER STORY

## Beshert A Conversation with Steven Spielberg & Renée Firestone

Photos by Kim Fox

The Yiddish word beshert (alternatively spelled bashert) is often used in reference to fortuitous relationships that seem to have been miraculously preordained—such as the confluence of people, places, and circumstances that led to the creation of a repository for the memories of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses and the establishment of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute.

Steven Spielberg, founder of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and Honorary Chair of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, and Renée Firestone, a Holocaust survivor, interviewee, interviewer, trainer, and educator, are two of the many thousands of individuals whose lives converged in the realization of a dream: to preserve Holocaust-witness testimony as a legacy for all generations. Recently, Steven and Renée had a conversation with Stephen D. Smith, Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, to reflect on the past, take inventory of the present, and consider the future of testimony-based education. Stephen D. Smith: Steven, I am interested to know what you intended when you set out.

**Steven Spielberg:** During my research on *Schindler's List*, many survivors seemed more interested in telling me stories beyond those that I was portraying in the re-creation of those events. They had an urge to speak, but they weren't being offered a microphone. I was on location

in Krakow, driving back after a day of shooting on *Schindler's List*, back to what we called the "Hotel Kalifornia," a bunker that used to be communist headquarters for Krakow. I was driving with [*Schindler's List* producers] Jerry Molen and Branko Lustig, and I said, "You know, I just heard the most amazing story from a woman named Louisa. She kept saying, "Can you write this down?" But I didn't have a pencil on me. So she said, "Well, can I speak into a tape recorder!" I said to Branko and Jerry, "I don't believe Louisa's alone; I wonder if we could get the names of all the Holocaust survivors all around the world, and camera crews, and send them to every country where the survivors are living?"

## Stephen D. Smith: Renée, what did you think about the project when you first heard about it?

**Renée Firestone:** I thought, "This will never happen." I just couldn't imagine it. I said, "This director"—I didn't know Steven then—"will speak for the six million who have no voices. And I thought, "This is the most incredible project."



**Steven:** I didn't have any idea how we were going to do it, either. But when I found out how many people wanted to give of their time, the level of volunteerism made me very emotional.

#### Stephen D. Smith: How did you feel when the tapes began coming to the lot at Universal?

**Steven:** They came in huge trucks, because these were the old days of physical videotapes. We put them into a server, and in addition to digitizing them, we had to catalogue and index every tape. During the indexing process, I had a system installed in my office that gave me access to 15 channels from host countries where survivors had resettled after the war. I had so many languages coming out of that room. In the morning I could walk in and push a button, and go from Hungarian to German to Italian to French to English; it was just amazing. I began by watch-

ing testimonies in English, because I could understand what they were saying. But the thing that really got me was that after seeing hundreds of English speaking testimonies, I was able to watch a Hungarian testimony and a Russian testimony, and I could hear Hungarian and Russian, and all these different languages spoken. And though I couldn't understand the words that were taking me back into these people's lives, emotionally they were telling a story where language was no barrier.

### Stephen D. Smith: Is there a particular testimony that stood out for you, Renée?

**Renée:** I was watching a Slovak testimony one day. This man was saying that he had been a partisan in Slovakia, and there had been Jews hidden in the mountains. He said there was a young man there who was an artist, who did false papers for these people in





# "The timing couldn't be better for the Institute; for of young people to know about the past.

the caves, so they can escape and live as Gentiles with false papers. He described how this young man took a potato, cut it in half, and carved an official German stamp into the potato. He called this young man by his Slovak name. Then at the end of the story he said, "But you know that was not his real name; the Jewish partisans, we had to change our names because it wasn't safe to be Jews and partisans. His name was Frank Weinfeld." And, to my surprise, he was talking about my brother!

#### Stephen D. Smith: Aside from preserving the testimonies, Steven, what were your thoughts about their educational use?

**Steven:** I saw that the final act of this endeavor would be to change educational systems across the globe to include tolerance education, genocide education, and Holocaust education as a basic precept in social science curricula. Ideally, I wanted high school students to learn this in order to receive a diploma. I was hoping from the outset that, someday, we would disseminate the testimonies to educators all around the world.

### Stephen D. Smith: Renée, in the online world we live in, how do you feel about the testimonies going into schools via the Internet?

**Renée:** I went to the Shoah Foundation Institute the other day, and they showed me the new technology. I couldn't believe it. I

mean, it's—it's incomprehensible what is possible now. And to think that 15 years ago, we had no idea.

Steven: None of us did.

Stephen D. Smith: Steven, you spoke recently about balancing between the "lightning speed" of the Internet and how we learn.

**Steven:** Yes, there are so many opportunities to consume information at the speed of light now, and so many opportunities to express who an individual is, through MySpace, Facebook, Twitter. From the sublime to the ridiculous, people are getting a chance to tell the world who they are. Individuals are forming networks like television broadcast networks, only it's the individual who's putting on the show—some of it fact, some of it fiction. But everybody realizes that there's a technology that allows them to count for something in this world. And it builds self-esteem, it builds interconnectivity, and it certainly puts people in touch with each other; not just here but everywhere. The great thing is that everybody is in the most wonderful position to be able to receive information about survivor testimonies.

**Renée:** We just did a Skype with two schools at the same time at the Museum of Tolerance, in Los Angeles.



## the survivor community; for a receptive generation It's **beshert** [destined to be]..."

**Steven:** You can see how you can quickly organize an event in a school, and Renée can be there to be the moderator; but then, she's also surrounded by 52,000 survivor testimonies, all digitized and standing by to express themselves about what happened in the 20th century. In a way, the timing couldn't be better for the Institute; for the survivor community; for a receptive generation of young people to receive the truth and to know about the past. It's *beshert* [destined to be] that we're here at the same time, doing this now, as opposed to 15 years ago when none of this ever existed. But the survivors existed then. And survivors—whether living or gone—will always exist through this Institute.

**Renée:** And they never dreamt that it will be recorded and preserved...

Steven: Right. So they will live on, and they'll all be educators now.

### Stephen D. Smith: How do you think we should incorporate the stories of those who've experienced genocide more recently?

**Renée:** I see you doing it. I saw the kids from Rwanda who were here, and I spoke to the interns from Cambodia. They all are now realizing how important the Holocaust testimonies were. Now they are going to be doing it also.

**Steven:** It's very important, because we're forming the visual history learning center at USC, which is going to communicate the stories of the Holocaust. It's also going to communicate the stories of the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia, in Armenia, and the stories of apartheid. Now that we're at USC, being on a university campus allows academia to look at the archive differently than when we were in trailers on the back lot of a major Hollywood motion picture studio.

Stephen D. Smith: What do you think we should do to maintain the legacy of Holocaust survivors into future generations?

**Steven:** When I first formed the Shoah Foundation, I said "We have to have the Five Ts: Teaching teachers to teach tolerance." We still need to get more educators to the Institute to discover the value of the testimonies.

**Renée:** For the second generation, I just hope that they will pick up after we are gone, and continue our work...And maybe the third generation will do even more than the second generation. Because they are a little bit distant from the Holocaust; it may not be so painful.

## Stephen D. Smith: Steven, did you fulfill what you set out to do that day at the "Hotel Kalifornia" in Krakow?

**Steven:** When I was younger and making films like *E.T.*, kids came over to me and told me how much they loved *E.T.*, and *Indiana Jones*; and now that I'm older, and I've made *Schindler's List* and started the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation—as it was formerly called—I now have survivors and members of the second generation coming over to me when I'm standing in line at a grocery store waiting to check out, or waiting in line with my kids to see a movie. I love being stopped by survivors or people whose parents or grandparents were survivors. There is nothing that satisfies me or fills me more with a purpose to look ahead, into the future, to make the Institute's mission more proactive and our outreach stronger. It also makes me look back and thank God that Louisa and others like her put the bug in my ear. ■

## Historians must approach all documentation, written or otherwise, with caution—even skepticism. As a corrective to archival documentation, testimony is indispensible. Oral & Video Testimony By Yehuda Bauer

Photo by Debbi Cooper

Oral testimonies: Many, if not most historians consider them to be a less reliable source than contemporary written documents. The reasons have often been stated: Memory is fickle, and witnesses are influenced by already published accounts of events; also, they are influenced by their surroundings and their experiences after the events they testify about; sometimes, they want to hide or suppress unpleasant memories, or they want to present themselves in a more favorable light than is justified; with the passage of time, memory is supposed to become even more unreliable, so that if we want to consider testimonies at all, it is argued, we should concentrate on early, not late, testimonies. All of this is true for testimonies about the genocide of the Jews at the hands of Nazi Germany and its collaborators (the Holocaust), but not only for that event. In some well-known cases regarding the Holocaust, people simply invented stories that passed as testimonies (as in the case of Binjamin Wilkomirski's invented memoirs, Fragments, 1995).

It is not that these arguments are spurious—they are not. However, what about the reliability of written documents? There is the well-known case of the so-called Wannsee Protocol-the minutes of the meeting in Berlin, on January 20, 1942, of top-level German bureaucrats who discussed the implementation of the "Final Solution," the mass annihilation of the Jews. The protocol was drawn up by Adolf Eichmann at the behest and under the control of his boss, head of the Central Reich Security Office (RSHA-Reichssicherheitshauptamt) Reinhard Heydrich, who instructed Eichmann to "cook" the protocol to reflect what he wanted to preserve as a record of the meeting. Eichmann's testimony at his trial in Jerusalem not only explained how the protocol was written but also supplied additional information about the background and the actual discussion, which put the Wannsee Conference in a different light from what could have been derived from the written minutes only. Many other examples could be offered to show that documents have to be checked carefully for their veracity and cannot be accepted at face value. Thus, the reports of SS and police from the occupied Soviet Union, from the Baltic countries and Poland are often misleading, because they were drawn up to please superior commanders. The same applies, for instance, to



the German reports of the Warsaw ghetto rebellion. Detailed research, involving oral testimonies, shows that German reporting hid a great deal of what occurred. Also, testimonies taken in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust are often laconic, because of the immediate aftereffect of the trauma the witnesses experienced. In time, memory returns, and events that the witness could not relate because of the trauma they represented can be uncovered later in life. Hence, it is not necessarily true to say that later testimonies are to be rated less reliable than earlier ones. This is shown quite clearly in comparisons between testimonies by the same person given at different times in his life.

All this does not mean that written documentation is not very important; but it does teach us that we should handle the different kinds of evidence with the same care, and yes, skepticism. For the Holocaust, a large number of events cannot be reconstructed by documentation, because it was either destroyed, or never existed. There is no other way to deal with it but to use oral testimonies. Of course, a single testimony about a certain event is not reliable; but if there are a number of testimonies relating to the same event, they can be crosschecked and analyzed. The result of such a procedure is more reliable than a written document. Thus, the testimony of

Oswald Rufeisen, the Jew (he later converted to Catholicism) who pretended to be a Polish-German ethnic, and warned an eastern Polish Jewish community (in Mir, now Belarus) of the impending disaster and smuggled arms to them, together with testimonies of other survivors from that place, is considerably

more reliable than the brief mention in German documentation. In fact, it is impossible to do work on the Holocaust without the testimonies of survivors, and also of perpetrators and bystanders, though these latter must be treated with greater reserve.

But it is not only in research that testimonies should be used. With the passing of the survivors, video-recorded testimonies must and will be used in the classroom. Not every testimony is suited for such use, and not every testimony is reliable: They must be checked and crosschecked, but then they become an indispen-

Yehuda Bauer is a leading authority on the subject of the Holocaust. He is Professor Emeritus of Holocaust studies at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Bauer was the founding editor of the Journal of Holocaust and Genocide Studies as well as a member of the editorial board of the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, published in 1990 by Yad Vashem. He is a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and he serves as the academic adviser to Yad Vashem and the Honorary Chairman of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. sible part of education on the Holocaust. Education should be understood in the widest sense: not only of young people but of adults, and of opinion- and policymakers. The treasure trove of the more than 50,000 testimonies of the Shoah Foundation Institute can and no doubt will be mined for such purposes.

Oral testimonies have been used, and will continue to be used, not only regarding the genocide of the Jews but also in relation to other genocides and mass murders. Use is being made, today, of oral and/or video testimonies in raising public awareness to ongoing genocidal events. There, the use must be even more careful, because misuse for political purposes of doubtful ethical value, and use of doubtful testimonies, is easy. However, judicious presentation of testimonies, when they are deemed reliable, can make it easier to persuade an indifferent audience to look at a reality that is unfortunately very much with us today.

I started my work as a historian with a mix of written documentation and oral testimonies in my Ph.D., which dealt with the Jews of Palestine during World War II. I was director of the oral documentation project at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University from 1961 on, and then recorded testimonies (on wire recorders!) about the postwar organization of the flight

### "Education has to be understood in the widest sense: not only of young people but of adults, and of opinion- and policy-makers as well.

of Eastern European Jews to Central Europe and Palestine, called the Brichah, in the aftermath of the war (1944–1948). In 1958, I started my work on the Holocaust with oral testimonies of survivors; I then began to compare those testimonies with the wealth of written documentation, especially on ordinary life of Jews, and of rescue attempts, in Eastern Europe.

Oral testimony is important not only for research on the Holocaust but also for other genocides that cannot be investigated by working through archives only—oral documentation is vital as an addition and as a corrective to archival documentation. It can and should be used for other purposes also, social, economic, and cultural. Sociological, psychological, and sociopsychological studies use oral documentation as well, and rightly so. But people must also be aware of the pitfalls. The principle should be that one testimony is interesting but not persuasive; two converging testimonies create a basis for consideration, 10 converging testimonies are proof.

One can argue, with some justification, that oral witnessing stood at the cradle of historical writing, with Herodotus and Thucydides. It is very much alive today.

## What Will Be Lost

#### By Colleen Tambuscio

In April 2009, Michael Berenbaum wrote an essay titled, *When the Last Survivor is Gone*. This piece communicated a sense of responsibility in how to shape our TEACHING when we will not be able to bring survivors into our classrooms.

**Colleen Tambuscio** is a teacher at New Milford High School in New Milford, NJ, and a consultant to the NJ Commission on Holocaust Education. She was named a Mandel Fellow to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1998 and now serves as a Regional Museum Educator and the Regional Coordinator for the Northeast Region for the Museum. Ambuscio is the founder and President of the Council of Holocaust Educators.

Berenbaum's insight struck a chord with me as a teacher and forced me to reevaluate how I present oral history in my own classroom; it reminded me of the precious resource of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Berenbaum questions, "What will be lost when the last survivor is gone?" and concludes that "survivors have a unique moral authority" in their ability to communicate to an audience their stories of survival against unwarranted persecution. Additionally, I have observed through my students that when meeting with a survivor, the ability to engage in direct questioning enriches and broadens the learner's understanding. So what does one do then to reconcile the dilemma of time passing and the remaining survivors, and

their living words, with it?

In my classes I have had the opportunity to utilize testimonies via the USC Shoah Foundation Institute website and to align them with the many historical themes taught in my semester course, so in approaching the above-referenced question, and in an effort to bridge the present with the future, I revisited my use of visual history testimony in the classroom. I decided it is time to incorporate the testimonies of survivors who I know personally and then, through the use of live Skype and/or classroom visits, engage my students in interactive conversations with them. Using tapes of survivor stories, followed up with student conversations with actual survivors, information that was recorded years ago can be revisited, clarified and elaborated upon when allowing survivors to talk personally with students. Why is this important? As a teacher, I will need to answer the questions of future students without the ability to engage in what today can still be live questioning. I want to be able to fill this void with some level of knowledge knowing full well that I cannot be the voice of the survivor, but I can answer for what additional information and lessons about humanity they will have given us while they were present in our classrooms.

As an active teacher of the Holocaust and genocide, strategies such as this are a response to a dilemma that will offer more to the future of my teaching than relying only on an archive of testimonies. Incorporating these live testimonies into our teaching now will not only help fill a void that is inevitable, but will allow us to learn immeasurable lessons from the mouths of those who will not be able teach us firsthand for much longer.



## Heir to My Grandparents' Memories

#### By Sara Greenberg

As a GRANDDAUGHTER of Holocaust survivors, I feel compelled to ensure that the *legacy of my grandparents* and all others affected by the Holocaust is NOT LOST.



Sara Greenberg with her grandparents, Joseph (L) and Reli Gringlas

Sara Greenberg's film B-2247: A Granddaughter's Understanding (2009) has screened at the UN, at international film festivals, and in classrooms nationwide. She is now working with the Institute, ADL's Bearing Witness™ Program, and 3GNY to encourage other members of the third generation to become involved in Holocaust education. A 2009 graduate of Yale College with a B.A. in economics, Greenberg works in the Strategy Group at Thomson Reuters. She will attend Harvard Business School in fall 2011. It was only in the last few years that I realized this. My grandfather, Joseph Gringlas, was born in Ostrowiec, Poland. The youngest of six children, he was separated from his family at the age of 14 and forced into a labor camp before ultimately being transported to Auschwitz. My grandmother, Reli Keisler Gringlas, was born in Bodrogszentes, Czechoslovakia, and spent the war hidden away with her mother in the basement of a Catholic family's house in the mountains of Slovakia.

I was a young child when I first learned of their stories. I have a vivid memory of sitting on my family's couch as an 8-year old, pointing, asking and ultimately listening as my grandfather told me about his "lucky number." As a bat mitzvah, I remember lighting my grandmother's Shabbat candlesticks for the first time, listening as she told me how her family had buried these same candlesticks underground in order to save them from being destroyed by the Nazis.

Their stories were always present.

But it was not until five years ago, when my family traveled with my grandparents back to each of their hometowns in Eastern Europe, that I began to understand the enormity and horror of their past.

Throughout the trip, my parents, siblings, and I interviewed, recorded, and listened to

my grandparents relay the details of their stories. Walking through the central square of my grandfather's hometown, my grandfather told us of the time when the Nazis rounded up all of the town's intelligentsia, shooting them one by one, as the townspeople looked on. Later, when we entered his former barrack in Auschwitz, my grandfather described how he "laid like herring" with many others each night, praying he wouldn't be one of the next chosen to be sent to the gas chambers.

These distant stories were coming to life before my eyes. I was sad. I was angry. *How could the world have let this happen?* 

All I could think of was how I wanted the world to see, hear, and feel the same way I felt at that very moment, to see and hear my grandfather speak about his time in Auschwitz.

And that's when it hit me—my generation is probably the last generation to be able to hear their grandparents' survival stories firsthand. We are heirs to their memories, and we inherit the burden of keeping them alive forever.

When my family returned to the United States, I was determined to share my grandparents' stories and preserve their legacy for future generations. I decided to make a film— *B-2247: A Granddaughter's Understanding*—a film that would capture elements of our trip to Eastern Europe, together with footage from interviews my grandparents had done with the Shoah Foundation 10 years earlier.

Reading about the Holocaust in a history book cannot compare to hearing about what took place firsthand. Eyewitness accounts and survivor testimony provide a unique, personal lens and serve as invaluable teaching tools in learning about the atrocities committed in the past. The hope is that after hearing Holocaust testimony, people will be more inclined to speak out and fight antisemitism and other forms of racial, ethnic, or religious hatred.

I have been strangely fortunate to have learned the events of the Holocaust firsthand. The majority of the world, however, will never know a survivor of the Holocaust. Through the use of testimony and personal narratives, the world can gain a better sense of the horror that occurred and perhaps even come close to feeling the way I do when my grandfather points to the number on his arm and begins to tell a story.

## The Gift of a Lifetime

#### By Lori Goldberg

"Some people come into our lives and quickly go, some stay awhile, leave *footprints* on our HEARTS, and we are never ever the same." - *Flavia Weedn* 

Lori Goldberg was honored to be an interviewer for the Shoah Foundation. Currently, Lori is the owner of The Spa Connection<sup>®</sup>, whose mission it is to connect people to life-enhancing vacations at destination health spas. One of her greatest joys was sharing a trip to Canyon Ranch with Jack.

**Jack Welner** was born Jacob Welniarz on September 10, 1920 in Lodz, Poland. Jack is a survivor of the Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Dachau, and a death march. Jack is an eternal optimist who sees the bagel and not the hole.

In Jewish tradition, at the Passover Seder we sing a song titled, "Dayenu," or "it would have been enough." Dayenu, at its essence, reflects our gratitude for what we are given and essentially an even greater sense of awe and appreciation for what we receive beyond our expectations.

Thursday, November 9, 1995, marks the day when for one interviewer and one survivor in Denver, Colorado, life was changed forever. My first interview for the Shoah Foundation was with an incredible man named Jack Welner. During the years since, I have shared many moments with this amazing human being, who has shown me courage, hope, wisdom, and love, all against the darkness of his past.

We have become best friends sharing life's joys and challenges, laughter and tears. I have



learned the meaning of resiliency through what he has modeled and what he has taught me. I have come to realize that no matter how difficult life can be, one should never give up hope, never stop loving, and always share a smile and a laugh with others.

Jack is a magnet for people, and everywhere he goes they gravitate towards him and want to be in his presence. On several occasions, we have gone together to speak at schools. I begin by sharing the mission and work of the Shoah Foundation and he follows with his amazing story of surviving and thriving. In one teacher's words to Jack, "Having you come to our school to tell your story was the most amazing experience I have had as a teacher. It is not only because of your experiences; it is the way you tell your story, with such honesty and love. Hearing of the devastation you and your family went through and then listening to you laugh and talk about how lucky you are, is an amazing testament to the strength of the human spirit. You radiate a powerful sense of joyfulness and wisdom. Thank you so much for the gift that you gave us: We are all a little better because of it."

One of the most important lessons that Jack has imparted is that you can't let the past ruin your future; life goes on. His imperative to others is that we use memory as a motivation to do good things in the world.

In 2008, thirteen years after doing Jack's interview, we had the pleasure of going to Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Arizona to celebrate his 88th birthday. This was a time of many firsts for Jack and a way to honor all that he has given to others in his lifetime. He had his first massage, took swimming lessons and had the opportunity to relish the moment in a place that has deep honor and reverence for life.

The impact of survivor testimony is limitless. I know for me it has been the gift of a lifetime, and the presence of survivors in my life has influenced my thinking and my choices in immeasurable ways.

Change of heart, compassion, and openness happen one human being at a time. The facts of history are one reflection of the past, but the words, faces and accounts of each survivor's experiences is the history that lives forever in ones heart.

Truly, having the honor of being an interviewer would have been enough. Oh but *Dayenu*, I have been blessed with so much more.



ACADEMIC MINDS MEET "The conference resulted in a deeper, collective understanding of the archive's potential, and it has allowed us to initiate the communal process through which a framework of practice will take shape to inform the use of the archive in the future." – Stephen D. Smith, Institute Executive Director

> Right, top: Carolyn Ellis, Professor of Communications and Sociology at the University of South Florida

Right, bottom: Elliot Kanter, Librarian of Communication, Judaic Studies, and U.S. History at the University of California, San Diego

### **Visual History Archive in Practice**

Institute hosts first international conference on the academic use of the Visual History Archive

In March, representatives from 25 universities and museums with access to the Visual History Archive came to the Institute for the International Digital Access, Outreach, and Research Conference, an unprecedented opportunity for collaborative learning and dialogue about the use of the archive in research and higher education.

The two-day conference was made possible through funding from the Jim Joseph Foundation, which is assisting the Institute's worldwide effort to broaden access to the testimonies and increase their educational use throughout the world.

Nearly 60 academicians participated in the conference. Together, they discussed some of the most thought-provoking issues related to the archive and its content, such as when to provide context for testimony, and to what extent; the emotional aspect of testimony-based inquiry; the reliability of testimony as a resource for verifying the accuracy of other source material; and how testimony differs from other kinds of historical documentation. Professor Omer Bartov, the John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History, Professor of History, and Professor of German Studies at Brown University, delivered the keynote address.

"The generous gift from the Jim Joseph Foundation enabled us to host a crucial gathering of colleagues from institutions that have, along with the Institute, taken upon themselves the responsibility of bearing the voices of the survivor generation far into the future," said Stephen D. Smith, Institute Executive Director. "The conference resulted in a deeper, collective understanding of the archive's potential, and it has allowed us to initiate the communal process through which a framework of practice will take shape to inform the use of the archive in the future."

Visit college.usc.edu/vhi/ scholarship to learn more about the use of the archive in academia.



#### Institute News&Events

#### AUTUMN 2010

#### **IWitness Development Continues**

Pilot testing brings the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's innovative Web application closer to launch



In April, students and teachers at Downey High School in Downey, California, pilot-tested *IWitness*, a prototype application that will provide access via the Internet to a collection of 1,000 English-language video testimonies of survivors and other witnesses from the Institute's Visual History Archive.

Over the past decade, the ways

in which today's youth acquire, process, and share information have changed dramatically.

*"IWitness* will engage educators and their students in the learning that can take place at the intersection of Holocaust education, the topics represented in the archive, and multiliteracy studies," said Kim Simon, Institute

#### **Broadening the Archive**

Institute continues early steps to expand the Visual History Archive



"At some point, I did not know what to do," Edith Umugiraneza said. "I had no news about who had survived. I was only sure of those who had died."

Edith was recalling her experiences during the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide, of which she is a survivor. In March, the USC Managing Director.

*IWitness* will allow users to stream and search testimony, develop video projects, and share them with other students and teachers. It will include an array of contextual materials to enhance students' learning experiences, and it will offer guided, studentcentered activities. Teachers who assign an activity using *IWitness* will be able to view students' projects in a secure and contained "classroom" within the application that can only be viewed and assessed by the teacher.

*IWitness* is scheduled to launch in 2011. The *IWitness* project has been made possible through ongoing support by Dana and Yossie Hollander; Monica and Phil Rosenthal; Atos Origin; Jackie and Howard Banchik; Paul Kester; the Leichtag Family Foundation; Judy and Ron Mack; the Levy Markus Foundation; Karen and Mickey Shapiro; the Charles and Mildred Schnurmacher Foundation; Leo Weiss; and an anonymous donor.

Shoah Foundation Institute interviewed Edith, who now lives in Los Angeles, through a project funded by the ACE Charitable Foundation. The project has enabled the Institute to begin conducting pilot interviews with Edith and other Rwandan survivors living in the United States; additional interviews have taken place in Los Angeles and Indiana.

The Rwandan testimony project is part of a larger initiative to expand the Institute's



Access to the Testimonies Access to the testimonies in the Visual History Archive continues to grow. The entire archive can be searched and viewed at 26 universities and museums worldwide. More than 140 sites provide public access to smaller collections of testimony.

To find an access site near you, visit college.usc.edu/vhi/ testimoniesaroundtheworld.



Number of sites with access to the archive

**NEW COLLECTIONS** "The Rwandan testimony project is part of a larger initiative to expand the Institute's Visual History Archive of Holocaust witness testimony to include testimony from survivors of other genocides... The new collections of testimony will be disseminated for educational purposes along with the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses."

> Near right: Jeremy Howard, Francis Parker School Teacher

Far right, top: from left, Andrew and Erna Viterbi; Stephen D. Smith, USC Shoah Foundation Institute Executive Director; and Phyllis and Daniel Epstein

> Far right, bottom: from left, John and Ann Hill and Stanley and Phyllis Minick

Visual History Archive of Holocaust witness testimony to include testimony from survivors of other genocides. Last year, the Institute began working with the Documentation Center of Cambodia to help collect testimony from survivors of the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. In April, the Institute signed an agreement with the Armenian Film Foundation and Dr. J. Michael and Antoinette Hagopian, paving the way for the largest collection of filmed Armenian genocide survivor testimonies—approximately 400 filmed interviews—to be preserved in the archive.

The new collections of testimony will be disseminated for educational purposes along with the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses. To learn more about the Institute's work with the Documentation Center of Cambodia, visit college.usc.edu/news/ dc-cam. For photos and information related to the agreement with the Armenian Film Foundation and Dr. J. Michael and Antoinette Hagopian, visit college.usc.edu/ vhi/album/aff.

### San Diego Friends

Event introduces local community members to the USC Shoah Foundation Institute and its testimonybased educational mission



In February, **Phyllis Epstein** and **Erna Viterbi**—two members of the Institute's Board of Councilors—hosted the first "Friends of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute" event at the Viterbi home in San Diego, welcoming members of their community to join them in supporting the

Institute and its educational use of testimony.

Executive Director **Stephen D. Smith** spoke at the event and introduced **Jeremy Howard**, a local 8th grade U.S. history teacher who discussed how testimony from the Institute's archive has enhanced his stu-



dents' learning experiences. After hearing about the educational impact of the testimonies, many guests expressed interest in becoming actively involved in the Institute's mission through "Friends of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute" in San Diego.

The Institute looks forward to building upon the success of this effort by establishing Friends groups in other communities as well. To learn how you can be involved, contact Daisy Miller at (213) 740-6001.

#### Institute News&Events

#### AUTUMN 2010

### **Exhibiting at the United Nations**

"Generations" explores cross-generational effects of the Holocaust

In observance of the 2010 International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, the Institute hosted a January 25 reception at the United Nations for the opening of "Generations: Survival and the Legacy of Hope," a video installation developed by the U.K. Holocaust Centre and Heather Maio of Conscience Display. The installation explores the effects of the Holocaust on three generations of the Oppenheimer, Wallfisch, Helfglott, and Halter families.

**Robert J. Katz**, Chair of the Institute's Board of Councilors,

gave welcoming remarks at the reception. Holocaust survivors Reli and Joseph Gringlas, their daughter, Marcy Gringlas, and their granddaughter, Sara Greenberg, also spoke. "My generation is probably the last generation to be able to hear our grandparents' survival stories firsthand," said Greenberg, who showed a clip from B-2247: A Granddaughter's Understanding, her short documentary film, which includes footage from her grandparents' testimonies. "We are heirs to their memories, their stories, and their witness testimonies,





and we inherit the burden of keeping their legacy alive forever." For more photos from the reception and to watch B-2247, visit college.usc.edu/vhi/news/ generations. Left, top, from left: Joel Greenberg; David G. Marwell, Director of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust; and Dr. Ruth Westheimer

Left, middle: Robert J. Katz, Chair of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Board of Councilors

Left, bottom, from left: Carol Greenberg, Jackson Greenberg, Reli Gringlas, Joseph Gringlas, Sara Greenberg, Gabrielle Greenberg, Joel Greenberg, and Marcy Gringlas

#### **Preservation Update**

The Institute is making progress in its effort to create digital master copies of the testimonies that will preserve their picture and sound quality and make it easier to create additional copies in a variety of commonly used video formats. To learn more about the

preservation effort, visit college. usc.edu/vhi/preservation.



Percent of the Visual History Archive testimonies that have undergone the preservation process, 21,882 out of 51,694



## Preserving Memories Byte by Byte

The USC Shoah Foundation Institute has always relied heavily on technology to pursue its mission. Here's how. By Sam Gustman

Photograph by Mark Berndt

**Too often,** the individuality of those who experienced the Holocaust has been obscured behind dates and time lines of major events, statistical data, archival records, and other sources commonly used to construct history. But the Holocaust happened to ordinary people, one after another, and the whole point of the Visual History Archive is to give survivors and other witnesses a chance to share their stories, each in his own words.

If the point of testimony is to individualize Holocaust history and make it personally meaningful for others (especially young people), it might seem paradoxical that technology—something that could be characterized as "cold and lifeless"—would have an important part to play in bringing history to life. In fact, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute has always relied heavily on technology to pursue its mission. Here's how.

The Institute was born to collect and preserve memories of the Holocaust. This meant sending film crews and interviewers all over the world to interview survivors and other witnesses wherever they could be found—and from 1994 to 1999 this is what the Institute did. Once the interviews were recorded, they each had to be catalogued, then indexed—that is, specific video segments had to be tagged with keywords that let people identify segments dealing with topics that interest them. Once this was done, it was time to digitize and archive the testimonies.

At that point, we at the Institute had to ask ourselves, "What should the video's quality be?" It was an important question to consider, because although video can be digitized to look good on computer screens, TV screens, or movie screens,

a video's file size grows by a factor of 10 for each increase in size. We decided that it wouldn't be enough to make the testimonies viewable on computers and TV screens; we would also need to prepare for large-screen experiences. So, in addition to creating a 40 terabyte, computer-quality version of the archive, we created a 400 terabyte version for TV screens and a 4,000 terabyte version for movie screens. That is an enormous amount of digital content to manage, but considering how valuable the testimonies are to history and education, anything less simply wouldn't have been enough.

Once the Institute decided on the quality of video in the archive, we had to think about storage and preservation. Even with today's technology, the process of copying a file from one format to another introduces errors that diminish the copy's quality compared to the original. With nondigital items—take books, for example—errors such as torn pages and



Chief Technology Officer Sam Gustman (left) has been with the Institute since the beginning.

water damage can't be assigned a numerical value. But in the digital world, degradation is absolutely measurable, and every part of a computer, from the network card to the hard drive, can introduce error into a digital file. USC's technology infrastructure, for example, has an average bit-error rate of I bit for every 5 terabytes of data (or 40 trillion bits), which means that every time the Institute's archive is copied, 185 bytes of data in the copy will be different from the original, unless there is intervention-and such intervention can be very expensive. With this in mind, we had to decide how much error we would allow to enter the archive over time as it's copied from system to system. Though preventing errors can increase technology costs by a factor of three or more, the Institute has chosen to build a preservation system that will keep the archive's digital degradation to zero. That means no errors can be introduced, including minute changes that would take centuries to even detect with the human eye.

With the archive stored digitally, the next step is providing access to its content. Along with preservation, this is the Institute's basic function—the foundation of our educational mission. It means delivering testimonies in formats that people can use, such as streamable Flash files, downloadable Windows Media Player files for PC users, and Quick-Time files for people who use Macs. One advantage of being part of USC is access to the University's High Performance Computing & Communications' (HPCC) supercomputer cluster. At 72 teraflops, it's the sixth-fastest supercomputer in academia, one capable of transforming the entire archive into almost any digital video format in weeks-a task that would take many other universities years to accomplish. Thanks to the HPCC, we can deliver content to institutions as far away as Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, which is connected to the archive at 400

megabits per second.

Finally, there are scholarship and education services to consider. The Institute is developing a new generation of web resources (such as IWitness, a website that will make 1,000 testimonies available online), and working with the USC School of Cinematic Arts and other partners to identify ways to use the archive to support digital-literacy development among educators and students, and even to move the field itself. As these initia-

tives begin to transform how people learn about the Holocaust, genocide, and human rights, the importance of technology to our mission will become even more apparent.

This may sound technical. And it is. That is just the point. For the archive to be accessible and useful in perpetuity, we must continue to push the boundaries of technology every day.

**Sam Gustman** is the Institute's Chief Technology Officer. He has been with the organization since 1994, and in 2006 he oversaw the transfer of the Visual History Archive to USC. He is responsible for the archive's operations and preservation, and his office provides archival access and technical support for institutions around the world. Gustman is the inventor of 11 patents on digital library technology for the Institute, and he has been the primary investigator on National Science Foundation research projects with a cumulative funding total of more than \$8 million.

## One Student's Perspective

#### By Caitlin Koford

During my junior year at USC, I visited the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for a HISTORY CLASS I was taking. The visit was intended to demonstrate the differences between textual history and *visual history*, and it did just that.

**Caitlin Koford** worked as an intern at the Institute from May 2008–August 2009 while majoring in history at USC. In addition to graduating cum laude in 2009, she was recognized as a discovery scholar for her undergraduate honors thesis and received specific honors from the history department. Koford is now focusing on early Christian studies and biblical studies in pursuit of a Master's Degree in social science at the University of Chicago; she also works at the university's Center of Cognitive and Social Neuroscience. I was compelled to take an internship with the Institute.

As an intern, I watched many testimonies. In some, the interviewees expressed emotions such as shame, anger, love or guilt. I understood these emotions not only through their spoken words, but also from the expressions on their faces or the movement of their hands-something I never got from reading about these tragic events. Each person had a different way of expressing the same emotion; while watching some interviews, I felt a sense of anger through a look in the interviewee's eyes; in others, it was a grand gesture of tight fists in the air. At times I was asked to search for testimonies in which survivors mentioned aspects of life within the camps: their interaction with others, police brutality, practice of religion, and so on.

I was always fascinated by the very end of each testimony. In the last moments of their interview, most interviewees offered an explanation for why they chose to share their stories. Some suggested they revealed their stories out of love for, and in memory of, those who perished in the Holocaust. Others said they wanted to teach new generations, and some simply expressed anger and wanted the world to know the atrocities they suffered. These moments interested me because of the multiplicity of answers. For many people today, the Holocaust represents one cata-



strophic event. For the survivors, however, it is something much more personal. I remain interested in the ways in which the Institute's testimonies can help current as well as future generations understand the complexity of the many memories now preserved. How are we to receive 52,000 different Holocaust stories, each legitimate, empowering, and fruitful in its own way?

Today, after graduating from USC with a B.A. in history, completing my internship with the Institute, and continuing my education as a master's student at the University of Chicago, I think about the testimonies quite often. Though I study fourth-century Christian history, I feel the testimonies have a lot to offer me. As a historian, the diversity of the testimony collection reminds me to try to understand the many smaller, detailed stories that form the basis for a much larger and more general historical event. On a personal level, the testimonies remind me to appreciate everyday, to strive to accomplish my best, and most of all, each courageous story of survival demonstrates that there is no obstacle large enough to keep a person from living a very happy and successful life.

Each interviewee offers something unique and exciting in his or her testimony; together, the collection reveals a whole new way of thinking about history. The facial expressions, vocal tones, and hand gestures reveal more about each person's experience than words ever could. The visual images capture something I wish all historians had available to them for their research. In my own studies, I try to remind myself that, like the survivors' stories captured in the Holocaust testimonies, each historical figure I study has a personal story. The testimonies are a reminder that history is not just fact to be memorized, but a story of humanity, which we must remember.

## How you can *make a difference*. One person really can make a difference. If you would like to support the USC Shoah Foundation

Institute, here are some of the ways you can help.

**Planned Gifts:** Planned gifts include wills, charitable remainder trusts, charitable lead trusts, and annuities, and may help you reduce or avoid income, gift, and inheritance taxes.

Cash Donations: Gifts may be made by cash, check, or credit card.

*Pledges:* Make a gift that is paid over several years, on a payment schedule that is most convenient for you.

*Memorial or Tribute Gifts:* Honor special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, or births; memorialize a friend or family member; receive a tribute card from the Institute announcing the gift.

In-Kind Gifts: Donate goods or services that fulfill programmatic needs.

For more information, contact: Steven Klappholz, Executive Director of Development, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, 650 W. 35th Street, Suite 114, Los Angeles, CA 90089-2571, Phone: (213) 740-6001



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#### Autumn 2010

#### SAVE THE DATE!

December 9, 2010 – Los Angeles

#### USC Shoah Foundation Institute 2010 Annual Fundraising Gala

Honoree: **Jeffrey Katzenberg**, CEO, DreamWorks Animation Presenting Sponsor: TNT For more information call the Gala Benefit line: 818-777-7876



#### **Our Mission**

To overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry — and the suffering they cause through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies

#### Stay in Touch

Begin receiving periodic updates and information alerting you to special events in your community, new programs, and the latest Institute news. Send an email to **vhi-news@college.usc.edu** with "newsletter" in the subject line and your name and address in the body.

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