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**Historic Partnership to Preserve and Provide Access to Canadian Collections of Holocaust Survivor Oral History Announced**

Montreal, March 23, 2015 – As the world marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of the Jews of Europe, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre (MHMC) and Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre in Toronto are proud to announce an historic agreement with USC Shoah Foundation - The Institute for Visual History and Education to have their testimonies integrated in the Visual History Archive as part of the Institute’s Preserving the Legacy initiative. This will assure their perpetual preservation, as well as make the testimonies accessible to scholars, researchers, students, educators and the general public around the world.

“*The power of human testimony is transformative and confers responsibility to the listener. With the potential of current technology, the transmission of oral history and its use by Canadians to learn through a human connection and in an interactive manner, offers personal impact far greater than other means, to confront and prevent antisemitism, racism and hate. The unparalleled technological resources of USC Shoah Foundation, coupled with its abilities to promote educational and academic use of over 50,000 testimonies of Holocaust survivors through the Visual History Archive, will serve both Canadians and the world community,*” explained Alice Herscovitch, Executive Director of the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. Carson Phillips, Interim Director of the Toronto Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre and co-originator of this partnership stated: “*Our collections, those of small communities, as well as large, the stories of survivors who made Canada their home and contributed and built new lives here, will be used for broad educational purposes*.”

The Canadian collections are composed of over 1,250 audio-visual oral history recordings, including small collections from several Canadian cities that without this initiative would be at risk for loss. They bring to life the communities that were destroyed and the pre-Holocaust lives of survivors and their families as well as the experiences of the Jews who faced genocide during World War II. They speak to horror, murder and despair, but also courage, hope, and the ability to rebuild. As a result of this partnership, these 1,250 testimonies will be digitised and fully indexed so as to serve the purposes for which they were so painfully recorded, clarifying the Canadian story in relation to the Holocaust and Jewish immigration to Canada post-1945.

Stephen Smith, Executive Director of USC Shoah Foundation, declared, “*This agreement is also historic for the Institute. For the first time, we will be welcoming a collection which spans almost a whole country, and integrating it with the Canadian stories recorded by us two decades ago*.”

Thanks to the support of the Government of Canada, and to major private donors, including the Azrielli Foundation, Mrs. Paula Nussbaum and Jeanette & Michael Diamond, the agreement between the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, and smaller collection holders including McGill University, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University, Ottawa Jewish Archives, Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre and Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta, and Calgary Jewish Federation.

***Following are clips of testimonies reflecting the specificity of the Canadian collection that will now be publicly accessible:***

**Watch** [**Holocaust Survivor Joseph Cooper - Resistance in concentration camp**](http://youtu.be/ldMqAXX1iBA) **(1min6)**

Joseph Cooper was born on August 4, 1923, in Kielce, Poland to Orthodox parents. With the invasion of the Germans in 1939, many antisemitic restrictions were imposed. In the spring of 1940, the Nazis set up the Kielce ghetto, under the administration of the local Judenrat. Contact with the outside world was cut off, food was scarce and had to be smuggled in. In August 1942, Joseph’s parents and seven of his siblings were killed in the Treblinka death camp. The Kielce ghetto was liquidated in spring 1943 and Joseph was deported to Pionki labour camp where he was forced to load coal to manufacture ammunition. In 1944, he was taken along with one of his brothers to Auschwitz. Later, Joseph was forced to labour at Sosnowiec concentration camp. He maintained his faith through song, risking his life by singing Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur. In January 1945, Sosnowiec was evacuated and Joseph was forced on a death march toward Germany. Out of the 900 prisoners who left Sosnowiec, about 250 were alive when they arrived in Mauthausen concentration camp. Joseph attempted to escape on several occasions but was unsuccessful. He spent two months enduring forced labour in Mauthausen until he was taken to Ebensee concentration camp in spring 1945. American soldiers liberated the camp on May 6, 1945. After liberation, Joseph and his brother immigrated to Canada via Italy in May 1948. He sang with the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto and moved to New York City to study cantorial singing in 1954. He returned to Toronto’s Beth Tzedec Congregation, where he served for 49 years as cantor for the largest conservative synagogue in Canada.

**Watch** [**Holocaust Survivor Jean Kutscher**](http://youtu.be/DBPicl1NsVA)**, liberated by Canadian Army (2 min. 19)**

**Jean Kutscher** was born on January 24th, 1926 in Paris to Romanian parents. His parents had fled Romania because of antisemitism. Jean and his siblings attended a secular school and grew up in a secular home. They actually felt more French than Jewish. Jean and his siblings didn’t really know what being Jewish was all about until anti-Jewish laws were enacted in German-occupied France. In 1942, although wearing a Yellow Star was compulsory for Jews in France, Jean and his older brother ignored the decree. As time went on, Jews in Paris were more and more frequently rounded up. Both Jean’s father and brother were arrested and sent to the transit camp in Drancy. They were both deported from there to Germany to a destination unknown to their relatives. Jean’s girlfriend, who was a Gentile, helped the family and provided them with food. On Sept. 23, 1942, French policemen arrested Jean, one of his brothers, his sister and his mother. At the police station, adults and children were separated. Jean lied about his age, enabling him to stay with his younger brother and sister. One French policeman let Jean and his siblings escape. It was the last time they saw their mother. Jean was now in charge of his younger siblings and took his sister to a friend of hers who hid her while Jean and his brother left Paris. They planned to go to Lyon where one of their aunts lived. They managed to cross the demarcation line by themselves, without a guide. Unfortunately, they could not stay in their aunt’s apartment, and therefore joined the “Compagnons de France.” However, Jean didn’t like it and so returned to Paris without his brother. Jean worked as a salesman in a Parisian department store. One day, policemen came to the store and told the young men working there that they had to return the next day with some personal belongings. They were to be sent to Germany to work in exchange for the liberation of French POW’s. This mandatory service was called “Le Service du Travail Obligatoire” (STO). The police specified that if the men did not obey, the store directors and their families would be sent to Germany. Jean was taken to Germany and worked on a barge for one year. He was treated well and people trusted him. When Jean first saw the Allies in March 1945, he was hiding in a bunker near Duisburg. He was liberated by Canadians and served as an interpreter between Canadians and Germans for one month. Upon his arrival in Paris in 1945, Jean discovered the existence of concentration and death camps. As a result,

Jean enrolled in the army to go to Germany but his superiors refused to send him there. Instead, Jean was sent to Morocco in April of 1945, and later to Indochina. He returned to Paris in 1947. He married his girlfriend in 1949. Jean and his wife immigrated to Montreal to live closer to Jean’s brother and his family. In Montral, Jean discovered a Jewish life that he did not know existed. Jean and his brother became car dealers in Montreal and Jean has been a speaker for the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre for years. Since his mother’s arrest, Jean has continued to feel guilt and trauma.

**Watch** [**Holocaust Survivor Ursula Feist – Race Theory**](http://youtu.be/oAO-Kk5yy_8) **(1 min. 53)**

Ursula Feist was born in Berlin, Germany in 1921. Ursula’s father worked in a bank and regularly went to the stock exchange. Although they were the only Jews in their apartment complex, they did not experience antisemitism. She went to a German school, where most of her friends were not Jewish. When she was expelled from school because of her Jewish origins in 1935, Ursula attended a Jewish private school. Ursula witnessed the worsening of the political situation in Germany from 1933 to 1939, as Jews were gradually isolated socially and economically. Her father’s permit for the stock exchange was revoked and the family experienced financial difficulties. Ursula saw the burning of synagogues and destruction of shops during the Kristallnacht. Ursula’s father was interned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (Oranienburg) for eight weeks in November 1938. When he was released he was told that they had to leave Germany, and Ursula was able to obtain tickets to Shanghai for the family through her work place. Ursula’s parents and sister arrived in Shanghai in 1939, where they were later interned by the Japanese with all other refugees from Germany and the occupied German countries and lived in very harsh conditions. Ursula left for England in 1939 through the Kindertransport and was taken in by a Quaker family in the north of England who looked after her as their own daughter. Later she went to Birmingham to train as a nurse and lived with her aunt. She was interned for a year on the Isle of Man, where she worked in the camp office. She met her husband, David through his aunt who was interned with her. David had immigrated to London from Prague in 1938. During the war he was in the army and in the intelligence corps. In 1951 Ursula and David immigrated to Canada, where their second son, Daniel was born three years later. Ursula worked in the Neurological Hospital, then in the Royal Victoria as administrative assistant to the chief of surgery. Her first son is in the leather business, and the second teaches at Concordia. Both are married and have children.

**About the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre**

The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre educates people of all ages and backgrounds about the Holocaust, while sensitizing the public to the universal perils of antisemitism, racism, hate and indifference. Through its museum, commemorative programmes and educational initiatives, the MHMC is committed to promoting respect for diversity and the sanctity of all human life.

**About USC Shoah Foundation**

USC Shoah Foundation — The Institute for Visual History and Education is dedicated to making audiovisual interviews with survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides, a compelling voice for education and action. The Institute’s current collection of over 53,000 eyewitness testimonies preserves history as told by the people who lived it, and lived through it. Housed at the University of Southern California, within the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the Institute works with partners around the world to advance scholarship and research, to provide resources and online tools for educators, and to disseminate the testimonies for educational purposes.

**About the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre in Toronto**

Through its museum and programs, the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre generates knowledge and understanding about the Holocaust and serves as a forum for dialogue about civil society for present and future generations. Founded in 1985 by Holocaust survivors, the Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre has informed and inspired hundreds of thousands across Ontario. The Neuberger presents commemorative and educational programming for the community to honour dates of remembrance. Our annual educational events include programming for Holocaust Education Week, Raoul Wallenberg Day, International Holocaust Remembrance Day and Yom Hashoah as well as specialized programming for Young Professionals, teachers and educators.

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