Not To Be Discounted: Locating Holocaust History in Intergenerational Conversation

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Abstract

The history of the Holocaust has always been enlivened by the real-life presence of survivors willing to share their story, but Holocaust historians and educators now face the imminent passing of the survivor generation. In response, many descendants have assumed the mantle and looked for ways to impart their parents' and grandparents' stories. The author's grandmother was a Holocaust survivor but she never recorded her story, and the details of her history are scant. Faced with this conundrum, the author conducts an oral history interview with her father in an attempt to locate her grandmother's history in dialogue with him, uncovering and analysing what he remembers of her Holocaust history, and his relationship to it, and to her. Drawing on the work of Marianne Hirsch, Dori Laub, Victoria Aarons, Alan L. Berger and others, the paper concludes that there is valid and valuable history in the lived experience of having known a Holocaust survivor, which continues to add knowledge and depth to the study of the Holocaust.

Sometime in 2012, I was called to Montefiore Home in Randwick, Sydney – an aged care facility where my grandmother was resident. My father was overseas and I was on call to respond to emergencies. Evidently my grandmother had panicked when the nurses attempted to administer her routine medications – she thought they were trying to kill her.

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Second-generation Holocaust,
Survivor,
Postmemory

It seemed she was having some sort of waking nightmare and imagined herself back in Auschwitz, where she had been imprisoned as a young Jewish woman alongside three of her sisters. When I arrived, her sister Yoli had also come, and together we calmed her.

Whilst this incident imparted no historical detail about her time in Auschwitz, it nonetheless alluded to the lived experience of her having been there, and spoke directly to her trauma response. Dori Laub contends that a survivor's post-Holocaust life can impart a great deal about the history of the Holocaust, arguing that where words are inadequate to express the enormity of the trauma, "the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues".[1] My grandmother never told her story in public. No one ever recorded her history or wrote it down, and what she did share was only told in excerpts – snatches of half-told stories shrouded in tears and lacking in detail.

I was eager to know more, but my grandmother had died in 2013. So I speculated that "more" might be locatable in the history of her subsequent experiences with others – in the memories of her son, my father. I wondered if oral history – a discipline grounded in storytelling, memory formation, and meaning-making – might have something to offer my endeavour? Perhaps I could still piece together elements of her story by interviewing my father? Moreover, could I also be part of the conversation?

There was theory to support my approach. Marianne Hirsch's well-articulated notion of "postmemory" asserts that children of survivors also "remember" the Holocaust, not via first-hand memories but "by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up."[2] I therefore wanted to tap into three aspects

1. Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony The Process and the Struggle," *American Imago* 48, no. 1 (1991): 77.
2. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

of my father's memory: first, what did he know of my grandmother's Holocaust experiences? Second, how did he know? Finally, what was his experience of growing up as her child? I anticipated the latter two would inform the first.

Esther Faye argues that Holocaust history can indeed be heard in the life-stories of children of survivors, despite the indirect nature of their memories.[3] For Faye, an experienced oral historian of second-generation testimony, a "kernel of 'real' and unassimilated 'deep memory' sometimes makes its appearance" when interviewing the second generation, and this "entitles their testimonies to be thought of as a kind of witnessing."[4] What I understand Faye to mean is that, whilst the second generation may not remember the Holocaust, they can certainly "bear witness" to the memory of it.[5] The memories I was searching for then, might still be found embedded in the relationship between my father and grandmother, for as Melvin Jules Bukiet explains, "The Second Generation will never know what the First Generation knows in its bones, but what the Second Generation knows better than anyone else is the First Generation."[6] Lorne Shirinian, a poet and child of survivors of the Armenian Genocide, picks up the argument. He claims to "remember genocide as a second-generation witness," despite acknowledging that he "never lived through" the events that he writes about.[7] He knows he will never "know" what his parents witnessed and experienced, but contends with certainty that what he does "know", as their son, is them. "I received and inherited their legacy," he writes, "and that cannot be discounted."[8] Like Shirinian, I sensed there was history in my father's relationship with my grandmother, in him having known her, and that an enquiry into his

3. Esther Faye, "Missing the 'Real' Trace Of Trauma: How The Second Generation Remember The Holocaust," *American Imago* 58, no. 2 (2001): 526.
4. Faye, "Missing the Real," 526.
5. Faye, "Missing the Real," 526.
6. Melvin Jules Bukiet, quoted in Uta Larkey, "Transcending Memory in Survivors' Families," in *Jewish Families in Europe 1939-Present: History, Representation, and Memory*, ed. Joanna Beata Michlic (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 213.
7. Lorne Shirinian, "So Far from Home," in *Remembering Mass Violence: Oral History, New Media and Performance,* ed. Steven High, Edward Little & Thi Ry Duong (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 50.
8. Shirinian, "So Far from Home," 54.

experiences might deepen my understanding of hers. I was keen, also, to involve myself in the discussion – to share in the process and effort of remembering with my father. After all, I had known my grandmother too, and surely my memories of her might also contribute to my endeavour.

My effort to participate in the discussion was supported by the notion that oral history involves "the production of a joint narrative" and permits the "awareness and use of the interactive process of interviewer and narrator, of interviewer and content."[9] As Buchanan and Middleton argue, reminiscing "is a profoundly social phenomena" and I wondered if, given my own recollections, my father and I might remember "in conversation".[10] I took inspiration from Irene Oore, the child of a Holocaust survivor, whose memoir interweaves her mother's story with her own experiences of listening to that story, forging an intergenerational dialogue of remembering.[11] I was conscious, however, of the challenge of reconciling the role of "active listener" with "active participant." and was nervous, during the interview itself, of interrupting the flow of my father's narrative. I was aware of the benefits of interviewing family – the names, relationships and personalities I already knew, the things I didn't need to ask, my access to shared memories – yet wary that my close relationship to the material might come with preconceived notions which would influence my ability to really listen.[12] These concerns influenced my decision to lessen the conversational quality of the interview I subsequently undertook. I have, however, taken an overtly personal approach to writing this paper – given my intimacy with the subject-matter.

9. Daniel James, "Listening in the Cold: The practice of oral history in an Argentine working-class community," in *The Oral History Reader (Third Edition)*, eds. Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2016), 76; Valerie Yow, quoted by Perks & Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 7.

10. Kevin Buchanan & David Middleton, as quoted in Graham Smith, "Remembering in Groups: Negotiating between 'individual' and 'collective' memories," in Perks & Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 195.

11. Irene Oore, *The Listener: In the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2019).

12. Janis Wilton, "Imaging Family Memories: My Mum, her photographs, our memories," in Perks & Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 268; Kathryn Anderson & Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and analyses," in Perks & Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 186.

In generating an interview transcript, I noticed my father's speech was peppered with "ums". Moore has argued for the inclusion of every single utterance in a transcript, since each pause, repetition or exclamation provides fertile ground for analysis.[13] I agree, although felt that in my father's case, his "ums" were mostly a habit of speech rather than an indication of uncertainty. In written form, they disrupted the flow of the narrative in a way which was not apparent in the recording. I decided to delete those filler words which appeared habitual, and only retain those which genuinely indicated a moment of confusion, reflection or pause. He also sometimes repeats words as he captures his thoughts. These I retained, since they add texture to his "voice" and reflect the process of remembering.

My grandmother, Bözsi Fishman, known in English as Elizabeth, was born in Poroškov, Czechoslovakia and migrated to Australia in 1951. She had been married twice. Both husbands cared for her with great affection, but both died unexpectedly. The first, my grandfather Poli, whom she had married in 1946 in Cheb, Czechoslovakia, died at 48 years, when he suffered a heart attack dancing at a wedding.[14] The second, Laci Diamant, died in 1989 during a routine angiogram. She had one child (my father George), three grandchildren, and at the time of her death, three great-grandchildren. She had worked hard in her earlier years in Sydney and amassed reasonable wealth, including an apartment in Darling Point of which she was very proud. She was always immaculately dressed, wore high-heeled boots which she only relinquished after her move into the nursing home, and took cruises on the QE2, which I recall as a highlight of her retirement. She took pristine care of her belongings, many of which she proudly maintained for many decades.

13. As referenced in Francis Good, "Voice, Ear & Text: Words & Meaning," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 22 (2000): 103.
14. My grandfather suffered a fatal heart attack whilst dancing with my mother, Rosalie Fishman, at the wedding of my parents' friends, George and Anne Hedges, on 12 December 1970. Confirmed in personal correspondence between author and her father, email, 21 May 2022, copy of original in author's possession.

However, it was her experiences during the Holocaust which seemed to dominate her life, and my experience of her. Indeed, she maintained a somewhat legendary status in my mind because she had been in Auschwitz. That has not changed. I am still in awe of this direct link between history and myself which is situated in my grandmother's experience, in her very being, and in my relationship to her. The magnitude of that knowledge generated an imperative within me to share her story, which led to my becoming a volunteer guide at the Sydney Jewish Museum.

My investment in the project of imparting my grandmother's story is hardly unique amongst those who share my status as a grandchild of survivors. In New York, for example, an organisation called 3GNY was established in 2005 to teach the third generation how to effectively tell their grandparents' stories as a means to "preserve the legacies and the lessons of the Holocaust." [15] The organisation now boasts over 5000 members and the program has expanded across multiple cities in the United States, and even to Sydney. Equally, there exists a growing mass of Holocaust literature generated by third generation authors seeking to address and respond to the grand trauma embedded in their familial past.[16] For these writers, the Holocaust has been a constant and haunting, albeit peripheral, presence in their lives, and, as their grandparents age and pass away, the magnitude of their felt connection to the event has led to an urgent and compulsive need to ensure their grandparent's stories are not lost.[17]

Like so many others in my situation, protecting the legacy of my grandmother's story is restrained by how little I actually know of it, and so the decision to interview

15. *3GNY Website*, Home Page, https://www.3gny.org/, accessed 26 August 2023.
16. Victoria Aarons & Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History and Memory*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 9, 13.
17. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, Chapter 1.

my father formed part of an attempt to fill in the gaps. My endeavour was not without challenges. After all, my grandmother was dead, so we could only draw on my father's memories of her memories. What if he could not remember what he had known? What if there was nothing to remember because he had, in fact, never known? My father was equally concerned, expressing astonishment that I had allocated more than fifteen minutes to the interview since, he quipped, he "didn't have much to tell."[18] This suggests a lack of confidence in the value of his narrative, and alludes to what Layman refers to as a risk of reticence in the face of "narrator's purpose."[19] As it turned out, my father proved a willing narrator and we spoke for ninety minutes.

From the outset, he questions the reliability of his memory. For example, in describing his journey from Israel aged four years, he recalls some anecdotes told to him, presumably by his parents, with trepidation:

> In Suez, there was, I think it was in Suez, as I say again, I'm just, they, there was a Czechoslovakian Diplomat that somehow, well, no, it was not, hang on – shit – Ah, see, here we go. Now I don't want to mislead you.[20]

Later, in contemplating his memories of that time, he acknowledges he recalls nothing first-hand, when he describes the passage of the ship:

> Um, I mean, I know, I know, well, I know [spoken with cynicism], I mean, I think we docked in Fremantle…[21]

This gives him credibility as a narrator, since he avoids conclusive statements unless he is certain. Furthermore, his statements are dotted with phrases that remind me that memory is always inexact. For example, he starts a passage about one of his earliest memories – of being

18. Author's father, pers.comm., telephone conversation, sometime around 6 May 2022.
19. Lenore Layman, "Reticence in Oral History Interviews," in Perks & Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 237-40.
20. Author's father, interview by author, audio and video recording, Sydney, 9 May 2022, in author's possession.
21. Author's father, interview by author.

collected from Sydney's International Ferry Terminal with the phrase "I think it's made up," before continuing:

> I think it's made up, but I, uh, and I certainly am not convincing myself that I do remember it, but, for some reason, maybe because later on he had that car, I vaguely remember, I, well, sorry – I have something in my brain that sort of tells me that we were picked up by Chaim and Yoli… in… a Morris Minor… Now is that something that I was told? or do I sort of remember the car? I think I was too young, to be honest, to remember it.[22]

I had determined to start with questions about his childhood, hoping to stimulate the process by focussing on his own memories before moving to his mother's. This proved effective and his recollections of this time are fairly animated – he describes the layout of their Maroubra apartment, his sharing a bed with his young Aunt Alice and peering at farm animals in the neighbouring suburban yards.[23]

I understood my father to have been a "latchkey kid" – except his mother had been too scared to actually give him a key.

> I don't remember exactly when I got a key. But I'm guessing it would've been about seven or eight, believe it or not?... so I would wait, I would, when I came home – and as I said, that's my, that's my real memory, I would come home and there was a little sort of landing in front of the house, and I would sit on the… landing, waiting for them to come home. And then I, I, I remember that there was a lady that didn't have any kids… she would sort of ask me to come in. And I, I don't know… most of the time, I didn't, you know. I was, uh, I don't know why, but most of the time I sort of just sat there waiting, sat there, waiting . . . waiting.[24]

I have a picture in my mind of a lonely little boy, sitting sorrowfully on the steps – a "nebbish" (in the Yiddish) – a poor little thing to be pitied.[25] I seek clarification:

22. Author's father, interview by author; my father is referring here to his Aunt, Yoli Dunkel née Weinberger, and her husband, Chaim Dunkel.
23. Author's father, interview by author.
24. Author's father, interview by author.
25. "Nebbish" is from the Yiddish (*nebekh*), and translates roughly to "poor thing" or "to be pitied".

> Well, look, look, the other thing was, sorry, the other– when I say "waiting," I mean, when, when you came home from school, you know, virtually, straight away, you played in the street.[26]

Nonetheless, there were times when his parents worked overtime (which he recalls they frequently did) and the other kids had been called into dinner, when he would feel the dark coming on as he sat alone on that front stoop. While he does not remember being particularly scared in that environment, the recollection does lead to commentary about his mother's fears, and their impact on him.

> Actually, for a long time, through Nana, I was scared of the dark. I was. I was very scared of the dark and for a long time, I, you know, I would not want to go out. I mean, when I say long time, um, you know, I don't know up to the age almost of sixteen, I think, uh, I just, I was frightened of the dark - and that was, that was a Nana thing… I mean, well, she was frightened, she was terrified of, you know, she was terrified of the dark.[27]

He offers more recollections about her fears – insight into my grandmother's posttraumatic state – and its transmission to him.

> That was the other thing that, even in the, well, as best as I, again, as best as I could remember, even when, uh, even in the heat, the, the worst heat of the night say, we weren't allowed to open the windows because she was frightened that somebody would climb in through the, through the windows, and, and I have to say that I also, I mean, I took that on board, and I didn't like opening the windows myself, [until] much later…[28]

She was also terrified if an unexpected visitor knocked on the door:

> … look, if, if the doorbell rang or… there was a knock on the door then she sort of put her, you know, she'd put her finger to her lips for me and you know, we had to wait until we

26. Author's father, interview by author.
27. Author's father, interview by author.
28. Author's father, interview by author.

> heard whoever it was, sort of going… and we, we just, you know, [were] not allowed to make a peep until whoever it was left...[29]

This is where I am able to join the conversation with my own memories. I say:

> As you're talking to me, I'm having this vague recollection, which again, I don't know if I'm making up or not, of her doing that once with us in Darling Point… of her kind of going, putting a finger to her lip. 'Ssh', and kind of, 'Who is it?' and [her] being a bit scared.[30]

Here I am seen doubting the veracity of my memory. Has my father's recollection of Nana's finger going silently to her mouth triggered a true memory of her doing the same to me? Or am I imagining the memory based on stories I have known? My father concedes:

> Yeah, look, I, definitely… I mean eventually, eventually she was okay… or reasonably okay. But even in Darling Point, I remember that she wouldn't open the door…[31]

Other fears were also remembered:

> She was terrified of dogs, terrified of dogs. Yeah. And to some extent, well, not to some extent, I was terrified of dogs too, and that took me quite a while to get over that. But yeah, she was, she was terrified of dogs. She, she was terrified of uniforms, any sort of uniform.[32]

Uniforms were a central feature of Auschwitz, operated, as it was, by the SS, and the use of guard dogs to terrorise inmates was ubiquitous.[33] Here then, my father's recollections clearly bear witness to my grandmother's Holocaust experiences, and reveal their impact, despite being unable to tell about the experience itself. This aligns with Faye's position on the value of second-generation testimony.

Unfortunately, when we start to discuss what he actually recalls of her experience, his knowledge is surpri-

29. Author's father, interview by author.
30. Author's father, interview by author.
31. Author's father, interview by author.
32. Author's father, interview by author.
33. Robert Tindol, "The Best Friend of the Murderers: Guard Dogs and the Nazi Holocaust," in ed. Ryan Hediger, *Animals and War: Studies of Europe & North America* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 106.

singly cursory and limited to a few facts and a handful of stories. I am surprised because the grandmother I remember was never shy to tell her stories, despite never doing so in a formal or comprehensive way. In my memory, she used to talk about the Holocaust a lot. I am beginning to wonder if she told me more than she told him.

The cause of his limited knowledge soon becomes plain:

> I never ever asked her anything, ever. I was too frightened to ask her. I [was] frightened – not for myself – frightened for her. I just, it was too painful, I knew, for me to, to engage her in that. So I… I think I can say categorically, that I never ever asked her anything.[34]

This is a common feature of second-generation experience. Oore, for example, bemoans in her memoir, "Only now…do I give myself permission to…articulate questions…Before, when they were still alive, it all felt sacred and untouchable."[35] Others recall "a wall of silence" or a limited transmission of real knowledge.[36]

So instead, my father's information comes from overheard snippets – in trails of sentences left hanging, in the interjections and murmurs amid the chatter when the sisters came around, or their friends visited, in the undertone of his mother's tears and nightmares, her shattered nerves and skin conditions. The sisters also hid their trauma behind a secret code:

> Alice and Mum and Yoli had some code that they had developed… it was just letters, you know, it was "kah-bay" or whatever, and that signified something… some code that they used between themselves to signify "be careful" or, I don't know, "got any food?" or whatever.[37]

Here I am hearing something new, and perhaps remarkable. This was a code they developed as a

34. Author's father, interview by author.
35. Oore, *The Listener*, Loc 527-32.
36. Larkey, "Transcending Memory," 210-12.
37. Author's father, interview by author.

protection mechanism during their internment in Auschwitz, which they brought into their discussions in their Sydney homes, years and decades later. My father clearly remembered them doing it.

The sisters spoke other languages my father did not – so I wonder why they invoked this particular language/code when they reminisced about the Holocaust? Was it the language of their trauma and therefore better able to perceive the memory of it? After all, as Laub notes "There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech." [38]

In any event, the code represented another excuse for my father's not-knowing. So, what did he recall? What could we remember together? He knew that, in Auschwitz, his mother had been sent to work in a quarry.[39]

> Again, it was nothing that she told me directly, but I just, you know, remember hearing that.[40]

That was something I had not known.

He recalled that she always maintained cleanliness in Auschwitz, to the best of her ability, going out every morning, even in the coldest weather, to rub herself with snow.[41] I knew that one, and added a recollection of my own – that she had used stones when the snow melted.[42] He told of a time she had visited the camp hospital suffering severe eczema on her hands. By her telling, she was attended by Dr. Mengele himself who addressed her as "little girl".[43] I knew that story too, and added my recollection that she had always spoken to me of the tender way in which he inspected her damaged hands.[44] Now my father adds something I have not heard before,

38. Laub, "Truth and Testimony," 77.
39. Author's father, interview by author.
40. Author's father, interview by author.
41. Author's father, interview by author.
42. Author's words, in Author's father, interview by author.
43. Author's father, interview by author
44. Author's words, in Author's father, interview by author.

that the doctor struck her as "the most handsome man she'd ever seen".[45] He prefaces the recollection with the adjective "blasphemous" as a way, I think, to acknowledge his discomfort in revealing a memory which paints a character like Mengele in more positive shades. This is an example of an individual memory in discord with the dominant public narrative, but rather than hide the memory, he presents it with a caveat.[46]

These are hardly stories – more like scraps of stories. I try to include more of my own – both to trigger his memory and because I want to be part of this conversation in remembering. I remind him that she was once selected for her slender fingers for what she guessed might be intricate work, but the Nazis instead had them digging into the ground with bare hands. He knows the story too, but offers nothing more. I recall that, at liberation, a Russian soldier asked her why she was naked and offered her a dress from a nearby corpse. My father does not recall that story. Nor did he know of another I had recalled prior to the interview about the nature of her menstrual cycle in Auschwitz.

It seems there may be some stories my father never knew, which I clearly recall her telling to me, often more than once. Perhaps this is to be expected given the passing of time, developments in trauma-awareness, and the less psychologically-fraught nature of the grandparent/grandchild relationship.[47] In any event, my father accepts the limits of his knowledge, and no more recollections come.

But together we locate a clue to her survival. I am the first to suggest, "they [the sisters] were tough," and my father concurs:

> They were strong. That was the thing.[48]

45. Author's words, in Author's father, interview by author.
46. Layman, "Reticence," 244-48.
47. Larkey, "Transcending Memory," 223-24.
48. Author's father, interview by author.

And he remembers a Hungarian joke his father would tell, something about a bunkósbot (transl. stick/cudgel) and how you could not beat her with one because she was so tough.[49]

> The one thing about Nana was she was not frightened of hard work, of physical hard work… She just, you know, if you had to lift something heavy to move it, she'd lift it... So yeah, in that, in that sense, I think mentally, in a strange way, mentally, she was quite tough.[50]

This depiction of his mother as robust appears at odds with the psychological frailties he has previously referenced, but I suspect accords with a refrain he maintains about his mother's fundamental resilience – for how else can one account for her survival both during the Holocaust, and after? Furthermore, the image he presents here reflects what has been described as a "functionalist approach to memory," one which helps us to "feel… content with our lives".[51] This approach is reinforced when my father summarises his upbringing:

> I don't think, I don't, I don't for a moment look back and sort of think that, you know, that I had a, I had a bad childhood. I didn't. I didn't at all.[52]

Interesting, this is preceded by a passage in which he acknowledges the anxieties he inherited from his mother, but also hints at having inherited her strength, too:

> I don't, um, you know, maybe it it's just me sort of saying, you know, I can cope with anything too, [but] I don't sort of look back and sort of say, ah, life was miserable.[53]

Here my father can be seen acknowledging that his reflections about his childhood may indeed be fashioned, at least partly, by a moral imperative of resilience.

As the interview draws to a close, my father reiterates what he now sees as my key "take-home":

49. Author's words, in Author's father, interview by author.
50. Author's father, interview by author.
51. Anna Green, "'Unpacking' the stories," in eds. Anna Green & Megan Hutching, *Remembering: Writing Oral History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press), 17.
52. Author's father, interview by author.
53. Author's father, interview by author.

> I never ever approached [her] and sort of said, tell me about it. You know, it was just too painful for me, and, and I thought, it was too painful for her. I just couldn't, I just couldn't broach it.[54]

There is a noticeable distinction here, which contrasts with his earlier statement. Now my father concedes the pain that asking would have caused him, as well as her.

There is the pain of knowing, and the pain of not knowing. There is the pain in asking, and in not being able to ask. There is regret because it is all too late now, anyway. There is the magnitude of Auschwitz and the awe contained in the truth that she was there. With it, comes a deep understanding of the impossibility of ever really knowing. Oore expresses it well when her mother tells of her tremendous fear hearing SS soldiers trooping upstairs towards their hiding place, "This is where I stumble. She will always hear the German boots. I will just hear the story of the sound of those boots."[55]

Uta Larkey contends that most children of survivors grow up sensing the enormity of their parent's experiences, but knowing little of its detail.[56] This is clearly my father's experience. This results, in Larkey's assessment, in an "obsessive need to imagine the Holocaust." As the grandchild of a survivor, I have also tried to imagine,[57] but I never get very far. I doubt my father or I have ever given ourselves license to really try, despite Hirsch's contention that postmemory is devised by "imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[58] Instead, we are struck by the "impossibility of fully bearing witness to this particular traumatic past."[59] Instead, the Holocaust looms unimaginable, and I intuitively shy away from the deep pain required to imagine my grandmother in that unimaginable terrain. Despite all my effort to transmit the memory of her experience, I may be destined to fail.

54. Author's father, interview by author.
55. Oore, *The Listener*, Loc 587-92.
56. Larkey, "Transcending Memory," 211.
57. Larkey, "Transcending Memory," 211.
58. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.
59. Alan S. Marcus et al, "Holocaust Education in Transition from Live to Virtual Survivor Testimony: Pedagogical and Ethical Dilemmas", *Holocaust Studies* (2021): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2021.197976.

I am also starting to question Hirsch's use of the term "memory". Shirinian points out that the notion of postmemory is inherently problematic since nothing can metamorphose a person's lived memory into that of another's.[60] Hirsch knows this of course. Hirsch's terminology, I think, derives from the immense and deeply-embedded implication of growing up as the child of Holocaust survivors, an implication so deep-felt as to resemble memory. It endeavours to reflect the enormity of the trauma and its consequences, both moral and personal. Yet the conceptualisation of memory as a trope for remembering the past does more than just emphasise the severity of the experience. As Aarons and Berger argue, it has come to also serve as a metaphor for understanding generational links to the Holocaust, and generational approaches to remembering.[61] Moreover, in an academic and educational environment where direct survivor testimony has found a privileged place for its unique capacity to personalise history, memory terminology invites "an affective link to the past – a sense, precisely, of a material 'living connection'."[62] The trope of "memory transmission" therein attempts to prolong the experience of hearing a survivor share their memories by implying that those memories might be viscerally passed down the generations[63] – an emotive and deeply personal hook that attempts to connect this important past to the present.

Members of the third generation appear to be deeply invested in maintaining this memory link. Aarons and Berger identify common elements in their approach. Typically, they assert, writers of the third generation commence with an "immense sense of loss… a void where family narratives once existed."[64] Theirs is a quest for recovery and particularity as they try to locate

60. Shirinian, "So Far From Home," 54.
61. Oore, *The Listener*, Loc 587-92.
62. Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 33.
63. Gary Weissman, "Against Generational Thinking in Holocaust Studies," in *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives: Memory in Memoir and Fiction*, ed. Victoria Aarons (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 176-77.
64. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 31.

the personal within the Holocaust's grand narrative.[65] Like me, they fear they have only scraps of knowledge and memory to work with. Like me, they feel remiss that the coveted detail is "information that people you once knew always had to give you, if only you'd asked."[66] In stark contrast to the second generation, those like Oore who was forced to reckon with the details of her mother's trauma since the stories spilled out of her, and those like my father who sensed much but knew so very little, the third generation dives into the void of their family history "with painstakingly unswerving descent."[67] "This is a generation," explains Aarons and Berger, "for whom bearing witness is a conscious, deliberately enacted choice."[68] We are willing participants in the conversation, moreover we are begging to join in. For many, the lure is identity-driven and deeply personal. In particular, we are captivated by our personal association to the historical behemoth that is the Holocaust, and by the suffering endured by our forebears. Many commentators perceive this compulsion to bear witness as the result of a "prolonged identification of shared trauma"[69] underpinned by "the threat of generations discontinued, extinguished."[70] Indeed, Aarons and Berger describe "a bewildered loss" and "a pressing desire to reclaim an inheritance from which it feels severed" as the departure point for much writing of the third generation.[71] These commentaries allude to a generation of writers suffering a deep traumatic inheritance, one that they are driven to overcome through their searches for deeper knowledge about their familial past.

Inherited trauma is not my experience. Undoubtedly my grandmother's history has taken, as Erika Dreifus and others posit, a "seductive hold" on my mind[72] but I have

65. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 17-18.
66. Daniel Mendelsohn, quoted in Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 21.
67. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 4.
68. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 15.
69. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 23, 296; Megan Reynolds, "Constructing the Imaginative Bridge: Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives," *American Journal of Undergraduate Research* 14, no. 1 (2017): 25-26, 33.
70. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 224.
71. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 31-32.
72. As referred to by Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 199.

experienced none of the "nightmares" or "array of Holocaust-related anxieties" Dreifus contends are so common to the third-generation experience.[73] Certainly I may have been impacted by my father's experience of growing up with a Holocaust survivor, but I am hardly traumatised myself, and, like psychologist Eva Fogelman, I take issue with the designation.[74] Trauma, as Gary Weissman accurately points out, is properly a designation reflecting a "debilitating psychic wound" and not a "desirable… mark of distinction" which, in Weissman's thinking, underpins so much generational theory in Holocaust Studies.[75] Rather, my compulsion to bear witness is driven by awe and admiration for my grandmother's experience and unlikely survival. Far from inheriting trauma, I agree with Fogelman that what the third generation has inherited "are values, worldview, family interaction and love."[76] Whilst loss may be "the motivating force impelling" many a 3G narrative, as Aarons and Berger contend, my compulsion is driven by other reasons.[77] First, I wish to honour my grandmother's experience. This, of course, is a commemoratory process more than any other. Second, I hold great stock in the immense value of the Holocaust as a moral history lesson for humanity. In this I agree with Aarons and Berger that the third generation senses an obligation "to turn the history of the Holocaust into a measure of the world we live in now."[78]As the era of the survivor comes to a close, I feel hopeful that as the direct descendant of a Holocaust survivor who also had the privilege of knowing her, my presence in the ongoing construction and transmission of Holocaust history might go a small way toward filling the empathy gap lost by her passing. In this, I suspect, I am not alone.

73. Erika Dreifus, "A Special Kind of Kinship: On being a '3G' Writer," in *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives: Memory in Memoir and Fiction*," ed. Victoria Aarons (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 4.
74. Eva Fogelman, "Third Generation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors," *Eva Fogelman Website*, 2008, unpaginated, https://evafogelman.com/publications/third-generation-of-jewish-holocaust-survivors/, accessed 22 August 2023.
75. Weissman, "Against Generational Thinking," 168.
76. Fogelman, "Third Generation," unpaginated.
77. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 224.
78. Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 35.

As for my father, he cannot really remember, even in the terms proposed by Hirsch – his "imaginative investment" thwarted by the weight of my grandmother's memories. Instead he turns to representations of memory – to books, theories, testimonies and stories. Growing up, I recall that he always had dozens of Holocaust titles stacked upon his bedside – he read on the topic voraciously. During the interview, I ask him to reflect on this compulsion,

> I can now sort of philosophise and sort of say, you know, I wanted to, to live her experience, not in, in the, in that, um, in that real way, but I just wanted, I don't know, I wanted to be, um, to be able to identify with her in some way. I don't know. I'm not too sure. But it is a, uh, but as it is, I know for you as well, it is just the, you know, I can't, it is the, uh, what's the word not over... over… overriding…[79]

I butt in to suggest, in the manner of Larkey, that it is something of an obsession. He concurs, but it is more than that,

> …but I'm just sort of thinking it's, it's yeah, it's, it's my entire life type of thing, you know, in a sense…[80]

It seems that the knowledge of my grandmother's experience, if not the actual memory of it, has been deeply internalised by him, and perhaps this is indeed his "postmemory". In further elucidating the term, Hirsh refers to Rosalind Morris's suggestion that "post" functions like a Post-it note, in the way that it "adheres to the surface of texts and concepts, adding to them and thereby also transforming them."[81] In recalling our memories in conversation, my father and I have engaged in a form of intergenerational memory transfer which has no doubt added to, and transformed, how we understand the Holocaust and my grandmother's experience of it, and in this way, I think, we contribute to the making of history.

79. Author's father, interview by author.
80. Author's father, interview by author.
81. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

Nonetheless it now seems something of a truism to contend, as Debra Kaufman does, that my grandmother's "memory is fast becoming history."[82] I suspect also that it is no longer her story, or at least not hers alone. It is my father's now, and mine, to tell. As Assaf Gamzou points out in his analysis of Michel Kichka's graphic novel *The Second Generation*, Kichka "appropriates the genre of testimony from the survivors and places it squarely in the hands of their sons and daughters."[83] Much like my conversation with my father, Kichka's story is not about Holocaust memory, but about post-memory and its effects. Indeed, Gamzou notices that the novel "does not include a single piece of testimony from Kichka's father. Reading it through, we only have glimpses of what the father went through during the Holocaust."[84] Gamzou is reflecting on the passing of memory into history, and the making of a new generation of memories. This "is no longer the testimony of the father but of the son. The son is the witness, and we must hear his tale."[85] So whilst my conversation with my father has revealed little new about my grandmother's Holocaust story, I feel I know her better – and there is history in that knowing, in the lived experience of my father and I having known her, which "cannot be discounted", and which I will continue to share.

82. As quoted in Aarons & Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, 204.
83. Assaf Gamzou, "Third-Generation Graphic Syndrome: New Directions in Comics and Holocaust Memory in the Age after Testimony," The *Journal of Holocaust Research 33*, no. 3 (2019): 228.
84. Gamzou, "Third-Generation Graphic Syndrome," 230.
85. Gamzou, "Third-Generation Graphic Syndrome," 230.

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