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Who is a survivor? Child Holocaust Survivors and the Development of a Generational Identity¹

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Abstract: In April 1983, the first American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors brought together thousands of adult survivors, child survivors, and children of survivors in the largest event of its kind ever held. This article explores the role of the Gathering in establishing a sense of generational belonging for child Holocaust survivors: encounters at the Gathering forced child survivors to confront their relationship with the concept of the “survivor”, and it was only after the Gathering that the term “child survivor” entered widespread usage, and the first support groups for child survivors formed. Using oral history collected at the Gathering, in combination with interviews conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the article explores how events such as the Gathering can have a catalytic effect on the development of a generational consciousness. It argues that the construction of generational identities hinges not (or not only) on the formative events of youth, but on an active process of engaging with and narrating a sense of generational belonging that can take place much later in the life cycle. It posits that child survivors only began to see themselves as a distinct group when – in the historical moment of the 1980s – they could locate their experiences in a broader story about who constituted a survivor.

I once had the experience at a conference of speaking with a fellow historian of modern Europe, a colleague some decades my senior, about my research on child Holocaust survivors. “Oh,” she said, “but they aren’t *real* survivors – they weren’t in the camps.” Even putting aside for a moment the fact that some of the former children who have shared their stories with me had been camp inmates, I was dumbfounded by her comment: it struck me as suggesting a reductive and ahistorical reading of what it meant to survive the genocide. It was only after this exchange that I began to think that our different visions of who constituted a survivor might say more about the generational space between us than anything else. In 2016, we have come to take a broad view of who can be seen as a Holocaust survivor: all those who, because of their Jewish origins, were faced with the threat of murder by the Nazis and their collaborators before and during

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge the generous support of the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust, which funded the research for this article. I also wish to thank my two research assistants, Genevieve George and Matthew Worrall, and the two anonymous readers who provided such insightful and helpful comments.

World War II – but lived – are now seen as survivors. This includes not only those who survived concentration camps, but also those who survived in other ways: by hiding, by passing as Aryan, by fleeing to safer zones, by joining the partisans. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) defines a Holocaust survivor as “any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945”² – thus widening the definition beyond Europe’s Jewish population, indisputably the Holocaust’s chief target.

Such wide readings did not always exist. As my colleague at the conference suggested, there was once a time when, in the absence of an authoritative definition of a Holocaust survivor, a survivor was presupposed to be a *camp* survivor. This was not, perhaps, the case in the immediate post-war period, when efforts to provide aid for the “surviving remnant” of Europe’s Jewry often focused on helping survivor children.³ However, in the 1960s and 1970s, as public interest in and knowledge of the genocide began to grow, a link between the concept of the survivor and the experience of the camps became entrenched, aided by a number of factors: coverage of the testimony that camp survivors gave at the 1961 Eichmann trial, the re-circulation of images of the concentration camps in the public sphere, the growing interest in literature by prominent camp survivors such as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, and the accessibility of cultural products such as the widely-seen 1978 television miniseries *Holocaust* – to name

² See the USHMM website for the definition: <http://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/survivors-and-victims> [accessed 1 November 2016]. The inclusivity of the USHMM’s definition was the result of debates, sometimes bitter and always political, that preceded its opening in 1993. On the issue of non-Jewish survivors and the history of the museum, see Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995), 114-23.

³ On humanitarian aid to surviving children in the early postwar period, and on the symbolic, political, and ideological dimensions of this project, see especially Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), and Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011). Hasia Diner also touches on aid to children in her work *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 150-215.

only a few of the “vectors of memory” that shaped public perspectives at the time.⁴

For those who had survived outside of the concentration camps, this tendency to equate “survivor” with “camp survivor” could complicate an individual’s relationship with her own past: if she was not a “survivor”, how far did her experiences “count”, either within her family and community, or in the broader public arena? This dilemma was particularly acute for children who had avoided murder in the Holocaust. Only 11% of Europe’s Jewish children survived the genocide (compared to an overall survival rate of approximately 33%). Of this remnant, comparatively few survived the concentration camps; most survived by hiding or being hidden by adults who took risks to protect them.⁵ Many emerged from hiding at the end of the war to find themselves orphaned and without family or homes. Yet before the 1980s, the term “child survivor” did not exist. Children who had lost both parents in the genocide were commonly referred to as “Jewish war orphans”. For those who still had one or both parents, there was no meaningful identity label for the experience of confusion, terror, and loss, emotions that had often deeply marked their formative years.⁶

⁴ On the Eichmann trial and its impact on public “memory”, see Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). On the growing use of images of the camps in the public sphere in the 1960s and 1970s, see Habbo Knoch, “The Return of Images: Photographs of Nazi Crimes and the West German Public in the ‘Long 1960s’,” in *Coping with the Nazi Past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict, 1955-1975*, ed. Philipp Gassert and Alan E. Steinweis (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 31-49. On the impact of the miniseries *Holocaust*, see Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 155-78.

⁵ The best scholarly work on children in the Holocaust – survivors and victims – remains Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

⁶ To date, there has been very little work by historians on child Holocaust survivors. The academic research that does exist has been carried out almost exclusively by psychologists and psychoanalysts, who began, in the 1980s, to write about the long-term impacts of child survivors’ wartime experiences – right at the moment that child survivors themselves began to forge a collective identity. The two processes were most certainly inter-related. Of these scholars, the most prominent was psychoanalyst Judith Kestenberg, who largely pioneered the field and was known internationally for her work with child survivors. See in particular Judith Kestenberg and Ira Brenner, eds., *The Last Witness: The Child Survivor of the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 1996), and Judith

This changed only in the 1980s, when child survivors had entered their middle age. There are many reasons for this change. The remarkable expansion of public interest in the Holocaust in this period prompted some child survivors to revisit their childhood experiences and begin to re-think the role these experiences played in their adult lives and identities. Demographic shifts were also a motivator; in particular, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, children with at least one parent who had survived the war began to witness their survivor parents entering old age, becoming ill and dying – and this, too, had the potential to bring them towards a moment of reckoning with their own memories. Alongside these slowly unfolding forces was a ground-breaking event that proved to be catalytic for many child Holocaust survivors, particularly (but not exclusively) those living in North America. This event was the first American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, a four-day conference that took place in April 1983 in Washington, DC, timed to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This event attracted roughly 16,000 survivors and their families, including an estimated 2400 child survivors.⁷ The importance of the Gathering, beyond the fact that it was the largest meeting of survivors ever held⁸, was that it

Kestenberg and Eva Fogelman, eds., *Children During the Nazi Reign: Psychological Perspectives on the Interview Process* (New York: Praeger, 1994).

⁷ 16,000 participants were estimated to have attended the Gathering overall, although up to 30,000 people attended the public events in the evenings. See Mike Feinsilber, “16,000 Survivors with 16,000 Stories,” *Associated Press*, 12 April 1983. The estimate of 2400 child survivors is my own, based on a careful reading of the 32 folders (comprising thousands of pages) of written personal testimony collected at the Gathering, and now housed in the archives of the USHMM (Record Group 02.002, “American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors collection”), as well as on the oral testimony collected at the Gathering (USHMM, Record Group 50-119, “American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors oral history collection”, and USHMM, Record Group RG-50.477, “Oral history interviews of the Bay Area Oral History Project”). Child survivors produced roughly fifteen percent of this written testimony, and thirteen percent of the oral testimony, giving an estimate of 2000-2400 child survivor attendees. However, as this paper argues, because many child survivors in attendance felt uncertain about whether they could in fact call themselves survivors, some may well have held back from providing testimony; if this was the case, we can assume the actual number to be higher.

⁸ A similar event – the first World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors – had been held in Jerusalem in 1981. However, the Jerusalem Gathering was considerably smaller than the Washington one, and does not appear to have had

brought together three generations of people who were, in different capacities, grappling with the meaning of the term “survivor”: the generation who had lived through the genocide as adults, who were largely survivors of concentration camps and ghettos; the generation of child survivors who had predominantly lived in hiding during the war; and a “second generation” of children born after the war to survivor parents.⁹ These three generational groups had had few such large, such meaningful, or such public interactions before the early 1980s, and as each group brought a different interpretation of the long-term legacies of survival to the table, the event became a seminal moment in which collective identities were challenged and transformed. For child survivors in particular, it was a key event in the establishment of what would become, by the mid-1980s, a distinct generational identity across the Anglo-American world, in countries in which child survivors were both immigrants and members of a religious minority. Following the 1983 Gathering, groups for child survivors began to mushroom throughout the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and beyond, and the term “child survivor” itself came into use in English.¹⁰

This article will explore the remarkable ways in which the 1983 Gathering brought generational hierarchies of experience into sharp focus, and the consequences of this for memory and identity between and across generations. It will, moreover, explore how oral history can shed a particularly valuable light on the ways in which generational identities are socially constructed, both in the historical moment of a watershed event such as the Gathering, and in its wake. Because organisers of the Gathering hoped that the event would play a

the dramatic impact on the identities of child survivors that the 1983 Gathering did.

⁹ Many in the “adult” cohort were nonetheless young – in their late teens and early twenties – at the time of their liberation. Thus “adult” and “child” survivors (and, indeed, children of survivors) might be no more than a few years apart in age. There is a tendency, in both popular and some scholarly literature on “generations”, to use “generation” interchangeably with “age cohort”, but in this case the two concepts are clearly not synonymous.

¹⁰ This trajectory was not necessarily paralleled elsewhere. For example, in France, the *Fils et Filles des Déportés Juifs de France* (Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews of France), a prominent organization run by child survivors who had lost one or both parents to deportation, was founded officially in 1979, but traced its roots to earlier activism linked to the mass social movements of the late 1960s. On this see Rebecca Clifford, “Child Survivors, Generations, and Memory in post-1968 France”, forthcoming. I am not currently aware of any similar research exploring the development of a “child survivor” identity in Israel, but such an exploration would be timely.

documentary and archival role, participants were encouraged to give written and oral testimony regarding their wartime experiences. In addition to a written collection of thousands of testimonies, volunteers at the event collected over 320 interviews with participants, of which more than forty were with child survivors.¹¹

This article uses oral history both to tap into this pivotal moment of subjective generational identity formation, but also to consider how child survivors later reflected on this moment and accounted for its significance in their individual and collective life trajectories.¹² The Gathering produced a unique oral history collection that allows us to capture a snapshot of generational identity in formation and in flux, but this material is even more revealing when it is combined with later testimony reflecting on the event. The article thus further draws on eighteen interviews conducted after the Gathering with child survivors who had participated in the event, taken from two of the largest and most important Holocaust-related oral history collections: the Yale Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, and the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive. In addition, five of these later interviews were conducted with individuals who also gave recorded testimony at the Gathering in 1983; while small in number, this handful of interviews offers a rare opportunity to see how individuals analysed such processes of identity formation for themselves, and situated them within their own life trajectories and narratives.

This has implications for some of the central issues that scholars debate regarding generations, memory, and oral history. Scholars of generations contest the extent to which “generations” are defined by formative events that occur in youth, or by social and subjective processes of identity construction. As this article shows, oral history is a marvellous vehicle for demonstrating that formative events in and of themselves may not be enough. In the case studied here, for nearly forty years child survivors shared a powerful set of formative experiences without having established a concurrent sense of generational identity as “child survivors”. It was only in the 1980s, in a historical moment when public interest in the Holocaust began to expand rapidly, that this was to change. This developing generational identity was relational as well as historical: child

¹¹ Here I have regarded an interviewee as a child survivor if the interviewee defined him or herself as a child at the time of liberation. The interviews are housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 157 interviews can be found in the collection catalogued as RG-50.119, and an additional 170 are held in the Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project (copies of which are held in the USHMM in the collection catalogued as RG-50.477).

¹² For a useful history of the Fortunoff and Shoah Foundation collections, see Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), ch.s 1 and 3 respectively.

survivors began to think of themselves as a distinct group precisely because they increasingly saw that they did not belong to the “generation” of adult survivors, nor to the “generation” of children of survivors. Furthermore, at the moment that these different groups were each working to position themselves in relation to the concept of survival, the very narrative of what and who a survivor could be was becoming more fluid. If we accept, as Margaret R. Somers argues, that identity formation is closely linked to narrative patterns, then we can see “that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; [and] that ‘experience’ is constituted through narratives.”¹³ It was not enough for child survivors to share formative events in their childhoods; they only collectively began to see themselves as survivors in their own right at a historical moment in which they could locate themselves in a broader story about what constituted survival, and who constituted a survivor.

The formation of a distinct generational identity for child survivors was thus linked to contextual changes such as demographic shifts and new mnemonic practices, but by the same token it was a subjective and social construction. Not all children who survived the Holocaust would have identified with the term “child survivor”, then or now. The new term was informed by a political and agentive argument: it was a means of making sense of life trajectories, a way of positioning individual experiences within a changing public memory, and a way of approaching new narratives of what survival itself meant. The formative events of the 1940s provided a common background for those who adopted the term “child survivor”, but it was the context of the 1980s, not the 1940s, that gave these child survivors an actively shared sense of generational belonging.

Methodologically, historic oral history collections shed a unique light on this process. Interviewees can literally speak to us from a moment of change itself. In the interview collection created at the Gathering in 1983, we can “hear” a collective story emerging of individuals re-evaluating their life histories in the face of social change. By then drawing on reflections in later interviews (and here this paper uses historic collections created largely in the late 1980s and through the 1990s), we can chart the steps that interviewees have taken towards a subjectively understood sense of generational belonging. Historic oral history collections illuminate this path in a way that few other documents do – and thus this paper also argues that oral historians should not be shy of making greater use of these collections.

What is a generation?

¹³ Margaret R. Somers, “The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach,” *Theory and Society*, 23 (1994), 614.

As many scholars have noted, “generation” is a slippery term. Alistair Thomson argues that, in its popular usage, the term is often “crude and ahistorical”, offering “little historical analysis as to how a generation is formed apart from the coincidence of birth, and no theory about how generational consciousness might be sustained over time through individual memory and in relation to collective representation and remembering of shared experiences and characteristics.”¹⁴ Scholarly interpretations of the concept are no less fraught. As Alan Spitzer wrote in a seminal 1973 article on the question of how historians might best utilize the concept, the very ambiguity of the term meant that historians should use it with some caution, probing “whether, and in what respects, age-related differences mattered in a given historical situation.”¹⁵

Across the social sciences, most scholars interested in generations draw on the theoretical work of sociologist Karl Mannheim, whose early twentieth-century studies of the sociology of knowledge included a consideration of the “problem of generations”. Mannheim argued that the issue of generations needed to be approached sociologically, emphasizing the shared *mentalité* of generations as well as their ability to act on collective social understandings, but it also needed to be approached historically and experientially, stressing that members of a generation share “a common location in the historical dimension of the social process.”¹⁶ His work thus suggests that the issue of generations sits at an intriguing crossroads between the micro world of biography and the macro world of historical events, an area of confluence that is also central to the work of oral historians. However, Mannheim’s view of generations took the question of subjective consciousness only so far. As Karen Foster has argued, Mannheim did not see the active development of a shared consciousness as *necessary* to the formation of a “generation”; rather, she writes, Mannheim posited that generations “were expressed as a sort of accidental harmony, different notes struck at the same time...summing up the ‘spirit’ of people close in age in particular time and place.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Alistair Thomson, “Australian Generations? Transformative Events, Memory and Generational Identity,” in Michael Böss (ed.), *Conflicted Pasts and National Identities: Composing Narratives of War and Division* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Alan B. Spitzer, “The Historical Problem of Generations,” *American Historical Review*, 78:5 (December 1973), 1354.

¹⁶ Karl Mannheim, “Essay on the problem of generations,” in K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1952), 276-322.

¹⁷ Karen Foster, *Generation, discourse, and social change* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 15.

Recent scholarship has critiqued Mannheim's classic work on a number of points: Mannheim has been criticized for privileging political events over social or cultural ones as formative experiences, for focusing on a male elite, and for neglecting the roles of popular culture and of the mass media in the creation of shared generational identities. However, the most significant recent criticism of Mannheim's work has pivoted on the question of how far generational consciousness is actively developed. Work such as that of sociologists June Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner interprets generations as actively formed and consciously maintained, a "self-conscious age stratum...[that has] a collective ideology and a set of integrating rituals."¹⁸ Borrowing from Benedict Anderson, Anna von der Goltz argues that this new scholarship sees generations "as 'imagined communities' in which individuals find a symbolic home. The cognitive and social binding forces of talking about generation have thus moved to the forefront of scholarly concern."¹⁹ In other words, scholars increasingly understand the construction of generational identities in terms of the work that goes into forming a subjective shared consciousness, making generation formation a far more active process than Mannheim originally envisaged. This article follows this recent trend in scholarship, exploring how and why generational identity develops in a given historical context, and viewing this identity as something that is actively and subjectively formed and consciously maintained over time.

In the world of Holocaust studies, there has been a certain amount of engagement with the concept of generation via the ample scholarship on the "second generation" – the children of Holocaust survivors – but very little on child survivors. In a 2002 essay, literary scholar Susan Rubin Suleiman challenged scholars to rethink the place of generations in our understanding of the Holocaust and its memory by defining child survivors as the "1.5 generation",

¹⁸ June Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2002), 12. For other scholarship in this vein, see Mark Roseman, "Introduction: Generation conflict and German history, 1770-1968", in Mark Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-46, and Bernd Weisbrod, 'Cultures of Change: Generations in the Politics and Memory of Modern Germany', in Stephen Lovell (ed.), *Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 19-35. There is also an excellent overview of this recent research in Anna von der Goltz, "introduction", in Anna von der Goltz (ed.), *"Talkin' 'bout my generation": Conflicts of generation building and Europe's '1968'* (Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 1-22.

¹⁹ Anna von der Goltz, "introduction", 15.

“too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews.”²⁰ Drawing on Mannheim’s theories, Suleiman argues that child survivors shared a particular experience which in turn created aspects of a generational identity: they experienced the trauma of the Holocaust “before the formation of stable identity that we associate with adulthood, and in some cases before any conscious sense of self.”²¹ She suggests that the common currency of their identity and experience as child survivors might be the shared questions they have asked themselves about their childhood experiences, the stories they have told themselves to explain these early events, and the collective adjustments they may have had to make, both during the war and in the years since, to process their memories.

Suleiman also rightly asks readers to consider who is a “child” in this context. This is an important question, because there is no clear and agreed-upon definition of “childhood”, just as there is no ready definition of “generation”. Definitions of childhood are historically and culturally contingent, and in particular, understandings of the point at which childhood ends (age 12, age 14, age 16, or age 18) have changed dramatically over time. Younger children remember events differently from older children. How comparable are the experiences and memories of a child under five with those of a child who has entered puberty? Suleiman argues that, in looking at the “1.5 generation”, scholars should consider three distinct age categories: children who were too young to remember (infancy to age 3); children who were “old enough to remember but too young to understand” (roughly ages 4 to 10); and children who were “old enough to understand but too young to be responsible” (approximately ages 11 to 14).²² Although I agree with Suleiman’s notion of distinct age categories, I have taken a somewhat different approach in this paper: in keeping with a subjective understanding of generational identity, I have seen as “child survivors” those who defined *themselves* as children during the war in their interviews. The vast majority of these were born between 1930 and 1944, so the oldest were no older than fifteen at the time of the liberation in 1945.

As suggested by Suleiman’s term “1.5 generation” itself, there is a strong element of positionality here. By calling child survivors the “1.5 generation”, Suleiman reminds us that child survivors themselves often feel sandwiched between – and to a certain extent silenced by – the generation of their parents, and the generation of children of survivors born after the war, who by the early 1980s had begun to form their own support groups and to refer to themselves as the

²⁰ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust,” *American Imago*, 59:3 (2002), 277-295, here 277.

²¹ Suleiman, “1.5 Generation,” 277.

²² Suleiman, “1.5 Generation,” 283.

“second generation” or the “generation after”.²³ In many ways, this is precisely what made the 1983 Gathering fascinating: by bringing members of these three “generations” together in such large numbers, the event demonstrated, at least to child survivors themselves, that they neither fit into the “first” generation, nor into the emerging “second”. We can thus regard the event (and the subsequent formation of a network of child survivor support groups) as catalyzing a sense of generational consciousness.

Of course, child survivors who attended the Gathering had always had a common experience of having survived the war, generally in hiding, separated from parents, siblings, and other family members. However, if before the Gathering, participants likely saw these experiences in personal and familial terms, following the Gathering this became part of a collective experience of reconsidering who a “survivor” could be. At the Gathering, child survivor participants questioned whether they could call themselves “survivors” at all. In its wake they adopted the term, and began to use narratives of survival to frame their own life stories. Moreover, in establishing the first groups for child survivors, they helped to spread this new understanding far beyond the relatively small number of child survivor participants in the Gathering.

The 1983 American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors

The 1983 Gathering took place both in a specific American cultural and geographical context, and in a specific historical moment with regards to Holocaust memory, one in which popular and scholarly interest in the genocide was rapidly expanding while Holocaust denial was also flourishing.²⁴ As the genocide increasingly became the subject of films, novels, and other cultural products in the United States and indeed globally, observers worried that the mass murder of Europe’s Jews was both poorly understood, and increasingly trivialised. As one commentator noted in the *Washington Post* in the lead-up to the conference, the event had a particular role to play in a country so far from Europe: “This is another continent, another generation – a new world. The swastika is recycled as a punk button; Auschwitz is a metaphor. And Holocaust is a series on TV.”²⁵

²³ On the development of this “second generation” identity, see Arlene Stein, *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁴ See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).

²⁵ Charles Fenyvesi, “‘The trick is to remember and to forget’: Surviving the Holocaust,” reprinted in *The Obligation to Remember* (Washington, D.C.: The

Demographic shifts were also underway that were changing the nature of Holocaust remembrance in North America and beyond. Adult survivors of the concentration camps were aging. As noted above, some children of survivors – calling themselves the “second generation” – were beginning to play a distinct and important role in remembrance and commemoration activities, and were in the midst, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of evaluating the role of their parents’ pasts in their own identities. The organisers of the Gathering were keenly aware that they were working within a moment of significant demographic change. As Benjamin Meed, the event’s chief organiser, observed in months leading up to the Gathering, “many of us are getting older, and there is a feeling that the hour is late, that we must bring our story to the world in a collective way.”²⁶ Other organisers noted that the Gathering was to act “as a preparation for a time when there will no longer be living witnesses to those events.”²⁷

The organisers themselves had largely experienced the war as young adults. Benjamin Meed had been in his early twenties when he was forced into slave labour in the Warsaw Ghetto, and then joined the Polish Jewish underground. Others on the central organisation committee had similarly been in their late teens and early twenties at the start of the war; several had fought in the resistance, and most had survived either the Warsaw Ghetto or the concentration camps.²⁸ In the early 1980s, they were chiefly in their 60s, and thus were motivated by an awareness that survivors of their age cohorts were entering old age. The organisers hoped that the Gathering would be an opportunity not just to bear witness collectively, but also, as an editorialist in the *Washington Post* commented, to show that “the Holocaust was real and not, as some revisionist historians have postulated, an exaggeration or the product of someone’s imagination.”²⁹

The Gathering was also taking place in the specific context of the development of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In March 1983, the federal government had confirmed that two buildings adjacent to the National Mall had been earmarked for the museum, and one of the central events that took

Washington Post, 1983), 38. The writer refers here to the miniseries *Holocaust*, aired on U.S. television in 1978.

²⁶ *New York Times*, 10 February 1983.

²⁷ *Washington Post*, 11 April 1983.

²⁸ The members of the central organization committee – Benjamin Meed, Sam Bloch, Ernest Michel, Roman Kent, Norbert Wollheim, Hirsch Altusky, Fred Diament, James Rapp, and Solomon Zynstein – had all been born in the 1910s and 1920s. Michel, Kent, Wollheim, Diament, and Rapp were camp survivors, and Meed, Bloch, Altusky and Zynstein had all survived ghettos.

²⁹“The Holocaust: A Gathering of Survivors,” *Washington Post*, 9 April 1983.

place during the Gathering was a symbolic handing over of the keys to these buildings.³⁰ This meant that certain political pressures that surrounded the campaign to create the Holocaust museum had an impact upon the Gathering as well. In particular, planning for the museum had been marked by debates, sometimes angry, concerning the very definition of the Holocaust and of Holocaust survivors. The United States Holocaust Memorial Council, set up by Congress in 1980 to raise funds for the museum, was under political pressure to adopt a view of the Holocaust that went beyond Jewish victims to include all those, Jews and non-Jews alike, who were systematically murdered inside the concentration camps.³¹ While the Gathering was not directly organised by the Memorial Council, these debates nonetheless had an impact on the event: although the Gathering was an event dedicated to Jewish survivors, organisers ensured that the definition of “survivor” was kept wide, and that non-survivor family members, particularly children, were encouraged to attend.

Thus there was an emphasis, at the conference, on the children of survivors. A special program of events was organised for children of survivors, spearheaded by Menachem Rosensaft, head of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and himself the child of survivors who was born in Bergen-Belsen DP camp immediately after the war.³² Of the 16,000 attendees at the meeting, an estimated 4000 were children of survivors – and they, too, were in the midst of a process of coming to recognise themselves as a distinct social group, a self-defined “generation”. Although children of survivors had begun to form collectives in the mid-1970s, inspired and motivated in large part by the growth of identity politics in the wake of the mass social movements of the late 1960s, the publication of Helen Epstein’s *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* in 1979 accelerated this process. By the time of the Gathering, there were hundreds of “second generation” groups across North America, including a local Washington DC group with nearly 300 members.³³ A second-generation participant in the

³⁰ Then-vice president George Bush Sr. officially handed the keys over to Elie Wiesel, chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, during the Gathering. See Washington Post, *The Obligation to Remember*, 46.

³¹ See note 1.

³² Rosensaft organized a similar program of events at the 1981 conference in Jerusalem, and the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors was formed out of networks established in Jerusalem. In this sense, the Jerusalem Gathering was likely a more significant moment for children of survivors than it was for child survivors.

³³ Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York, 1979). See also Washington Post, *The*

conference, Jeanette Binstock, speaking to a journalist from the *Washington Post*, recounted that two years previously she had begun to reconsider her own identity as the child of a survivor, and this had prompted her to listen deeply, for the first time, to her survivor father's story. "Before," she said, "I wondered how and if I should tell my children about the war. Now that I really know what happened, it's a matter of necessity: I have to tell them."³⁴

Adult survivors were reaching old age, and their children were assuming the mantle of the "second generation". What, then, did this mean for child survivors, who often felt excluded from the world of adult survivors, yet who did not see themselves as belonging to the "second generation" (indeed, the "second generation" was defined through having parents who survived, whereas many child survivors had lost one or both of their parents)? Unlike the children of survivors, in the early 1980s child survivors were only just beginning a process of re-thinking the meanings of their memories to their then-current identities. Those who attended the Gathering found in the event a moment of possibility that generated both opportunity and discomfort. When survivors attending the Gathering were encouraged to fill in a form recording their wartime experiences, including how they had survived, the options offered (camp, ghetto, hideout, forest) matched the experiences of most adult survivors, but did not quite encompass those of child survivors, the majority of whom had survived not in hideouts, but in hiding.³⁵ Even in the event's open approach towards the concept of "survival", a degree of exclusion reinforced, for child survivors, their non-belonging.

Before turning to the oral histories of child survivors attending the Gathering, it is worth placing a final concept, that of the "survivor", in historical context – for in 1983 it did not mean what it means now. Those who had survived the war as adults, and particularly those who had survived the concentration camps, often identified as "survivors". The thousands of pages of written testimony that attendees submitted at the Gathering attest to this: camp survivors, in particular, often signed their submissions "A Holocaust Survivor". However, to be a "Holocaust survivor" was clearly an identity riddled with complexities and uncertainties, and one that had an ambiguous significance in the public mind in the early 1980s. As one of the event's organisers observed in the week before the

Obligation to Remember, 34. It is interesting to note that, in the United States (and possibly elsewhere), groups for children of survivors thus predated groups for child survivors by nearly a decade.

³⁴ Neil Henry, "The Children: Inheritors of a Painful Legacy", reprinted in *Washington Post*, *The Obligation to Remember*, 34.

³⁵ USHMM, RG-02.002, "American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors collection."

Gathering, there was a sharp divide between the public image of survivors as “shaven, starving people in striped suits,” and the reality of survivors’ productive post-war lives.³⁶ Implied in such comments was the fact that many survivors (adult and child alike) felt that they struggled against a stigma attached to the concept of “Holocaust survivor”. At the Gathering, Eva Fogelman, a doctoral student in psychology who would go on to become a leading expert on psychological issues relating to child survivors and children of survivors, noted that some survivors had struggled to integrate into their local Jewish communities after emigrating to the United States, because of this stigma: “the implication,” she said, “is that they had done something wrong to live through it.”³⁷

Child survivors in a moment of change

Edith Riemer (b. 1931 in Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Germany) survived the war because she had been sent with the Kindertransport to England in 1939.³⁸ Her parents and her entire extended family were murdered in the genocide. At the Gathering she learned, for the first time, what had become of her father after he had been deported from Germany to the Gurs internment camp in the south of France, by consulting a copy of historian Serge Klarsfeld’s *Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* – a ground-breaking, meticulous study that detailed the fates of all 75,521 Jews deported from France.³⁹ Reeling from this discovery, Edith then had a provocative conversation with an older survivor:

³⁶ Site organizer Lawrence Goldberg, quoted in the *Washington Post*, 9 April 1983.

³⁷ *Washington Post*, *The Obligation to Remember*, 34. Fogelman’s work on the psychological issues faced by children of survivors was ground-breaking. She was among the first psychologists to organize therapy groups for children of survivors, establishing the first such group in Boston in 1976. Her work became widely known when it was discussed by journalist Helen Epstein; see Helen Epstein, “Heirs of the Holocaust,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 June 1977, 175.

³⁸ On the Kindertransport, see in particular Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds., *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives* (New York: Rodopi, 2012).

³⁹ Serge Klarsfeld, *Le Mémorial de la déportation des Juifs de France* (Paris, 1978). Copies of Klarsfeld’s book were available for consultation at the Gathering, and many child survivors learned the fates of their parents for the first time this way. In Riemer’s case, she had already known that her mother died following a surgical operation in Gurs in early 1942 – but she learned for the first time that her father stayed an additional six months in Gurs before being deported to Auschwitz.

“somebody said to me at this conference, ‘were you in a concentration camp?’ And I said no. And then they said ‘well then, you are not a survivor.’ And that hurt. Because I have lost every single one of my family, I am the only one left.”⁴⁰

Interviewed the day after these unsettling events, Edith’s interview captured a child survivor at a moment of raw self-awareness. In this, Edith’s experience had striking parallels with those of many other child survivors at the Gathering. Their interviews often attest both to the shock of learning about the fate of their parents (or other close relatives) for the first time through publications like Klarsfeld’s, but simultaneously confronting a disconnect between their own developing understanding of their childhood pasts, and others’ assessments of what it meant to be a child who had survived.

As Alessandro Portelli has argued, oral history tells us as much about the “time of the telling” as it does about the “time of the event”: there is a complex and dynamic relationship between the narration of remembered events, and the self giving this narration in a specific historical context.⁴¹ The oral history conducted at the 1983 Gathering shows it to have been a transformational “time of the telling”. For many child survivor participants, the Gathering was the first opportunity they had had to be in contact with so many others survivors, both adult and child. As Edith Riemer’s testimony illustrates, these encounters could be antagonistic, but the antagonism itself had a transformative potential. It forced Edith, and others like her who gave similar testimony, to challenge some dominant perspectives regarding who “qualified” as a survivor, and to begin to assert a different reading of what it meant to survive. It also allowed interviewees to approach and to narrate their memories in new ways, as they reframed their childhood experiences in light of this new reading.

Child survivors were only too aware of the uncomfortable position they occupied between adult survivors and the “second generation”. While the Gathering afforded an opportunity to confront this position, the confrontation did not necessarily take place vis-à-vis other participants: this could be an internal conflict as much as an external one. Many child survivors, indeed, were not sure what to call themselves in their interviews. It is worth noting that interviews with child survivors from this collection were generally marked, when the collection was first archived, with the subject heading “orphan”. Interviewers and archivists clearly felt just as uncomfortable with the term “survivor” in these cases as interviewees themselves did.

⁴⁰ Interview with Edith Gerta Riemer, interviewer unspecified, 13 April 1983, USHMM RG-50.119*0110.

⁴¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 185.

Felicia Neufeld (b. 1934 in Berlin) referred to herself as “a child of non-survivors” rather than a survivor in her own right – a nod to the gulf, in terms of identity, between child survivors and children of survivors. She felt compelled to begin her interview with her aunt’s story, rather than her own, because her aunt had been in Auschwitz, had survived, but had never herself given an interview. Felicia’s story of survival, however, was harrowing in its own right. In 1937, her father had left Germany for Paris, and in 1938 at the age of four she joined him there, leaving her mother in an increasingly precarious situation in Germany. Her unemployed father resorted to “hustling for food”, and she spent her days alone. One afternoon in 1942, when she was just short of eight years old, she came back to their small apartment to learn from her playmates that her father had been arrested – and had taken with him the only key to the apartment. Thenceforth, Felicia found herself entirely at the mercy of strangers, and developed “a consciousness that I think no child has the right to have.” She survived because she received help from adults: first from the kind concierge of her building, then from staff at an orthodox Jewish orphanage, and finally from a family who took her in when the orphanage closed. She recalls being so lonely and frightened that she took the only possession she had from her parents – a scarf that her mother had given her – and ripped it up and ate it piece by piece, “as if to hold on to this mother that I had not seen since I was four years old.” Felicia observed, as did many other child survivors, that the very meaning of survival for children was often intimately bound to the agency of their rescuers, recalling that “survival was a matter of luck, occasionally of planning, and in my case of the good – no, good will will never translate it enough – of the giving, sharing of other people’s lives, and I mean their lives at stake, their heads on the chopping block.”⁴²

If the Gathering prompted child survivors to re-assess their childhoods and their relationship with the concept of survival, it also forced them to confront how scarcely they knew their own pasts. This was particularly true of those who had been orphaned and who had been so young as to have no firm, clear memories of their wartime experiences. The parents of Jacques Fein (b. Jacques Karpik in Paris

⁴² Interview with Felicia Neufeld, interviewer unspecified, 11 April 1983, USHMM, RG-50.119*0099. Ms. Neufeld died in 2011. Her rescuer, Mme Renée Vérité, was a cook at the orphanage where Felicia was placed, run by the Jewish underground organization Rue Amelot. When the orphanage was closed, the children went into hiding, and Mme Vérité took a number of children from the orphanage to her home in Bienfay (Somme), where she hid them for the duration of the war. In 1995 she was recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous among the Nations. See Yad Vashem’s website for further details: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4018052> (accessed 1 November 2016).

in 1938), aware of the danger they were in, had placed Jacques and his younger sister Annette with the Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (OSE), a Jewish aid organisation responsible for rescuing thousands of children in France during the war.⁴³ The OSE, in turn, placed Jacques and Annette with a Catholic family, the Bocahuts, who cared for the children for the remainder of the occupation period. Jacques and his sister then returned to the care of the OSE after the war, before being adopted by an American couple, the Feins, and emigrating to the United States in 1948. His parents were murdered in Auschwitz. After the Gathering, Jacques began an intense process of trying to learn more about his early years, his parents, and the family that cared for him, but in 1983 he found himself confronting the paucity of his own knowledge, recalling that “I was born in ’38 and all I know is from papers that I had, that my mother died in ’41 and my father died in ’43. I really don’t know the mechanics of how I was saved, except that more than likely the OSE people helped me find a family. I forgot their names completely but I think the name Bocahut, something like that, you know, sticks in my mind. I had a sister also, I’m virtually positive that she’s my natural sister, because I’m never positive really, absolutely positive of anything. I don’t have anybody to relate to.”⁴⁴

Interviews such as Jacques’s caught child survivors as they began to think through what this thin knowledge of their pasts might mean to their present identities. Some indicated that they had already tentatively begun this process before the Gathering, but the interviews give ample evidence to suggest that the process was unfolding in real time at the conference, as child survivors were given what was, for many, their first opportunity to share their testimony. Here, we are reminded that oral history not only captured this emotional and transformational process as it was happening, but also helped to drive it: being invited to speak freely and reflect publicly on their lives had dramatic repercussions for child survivors’ grasp of the meaning and value of their life

⁴³ On the OSE, see Katy Hazan, *Les orphelins de la Shoah* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2000). The OSE was also responsible for caring for orphaned child survivors after the war, running dozens of orphanages across France. Among child survivors at the Gathering, there was a high percentage who had either been born in or passed through France (readers will note that most of the interviewees quoted here fall into this category). Rather than being a coincidence, this suggests a common trajectory: French aid organizations such as the OSE were more likely than others to assist their wards in emigrating to the U.S. in the postwar period, and all the interviewees quoted in this article emigrated to the U.S. in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

⁴⁴ Interview with Paul Kassy, Jacques Fein, and Felice Zimmern Stokes, interviewer unspecified, 13 April 1983, USHMM RG-50.477*1361.

stories. It helped that the interviews were largely spontaneous and unrehearsed: interviewees did not know in advance that volunteers would be recording testimony at the conference. The result could be intense discomposure. This is reflected in Jacques's testimony: as he explained in his interview, he had only recently begun to see that elements in his adult life – his divorce, for example – were linked to his childhood, and in response he had begun to rethink his adult identity, and even his name. He recalled that “my name was changed. I adopted my American first name, Jack. And it wasn't until very, very recently that I went back to Jacques at different times. In terms of belonging or feeling close, you are just not there. I don't think...you know, I don't think it will ever be...as I said a few minutes ago, being divorced, to me, just...it's a repetition of being uprooted.”⁴⁵

Jacques added at this point in his interview that one factor that made this revisiting of his life history possible was the simple fact of meeting other child survivors at the Gathering. In particular, on the first day of the Gathering, he met a fellow child survivor, Felice Zimmern Stokes (b. 1939 in Walldürn, Germany), who had lived in the OSE orphanage at Taverny, to the north of Paris – just as he had. Although they did not remember each other, in meeting, they were able to help each other reconstruct elements of orphanage life. As was the case for Jacques, Felice had been placed in hiding with a Catholic family in the French countryside, and returned to an OSE orphanage after the war, with her older sister Beate. Both of her parents were murdered in Auschwitz. Like many other child survivors, she had been apprehensive about coming to the Gathering, observing that “the first day, I was very nervous and anxious about this Gathering: what's it going to be like? I won't know anybody, because everybody else's story is better than mine. I didn't go through a camp. Do I really belong here?” Later in her interview, she expanded on this, revealing how difficult she felt it was to bear witness to her experiences, in large part because she felt that, not having been in a camp, she was excluded from the ranks of survivors. The following passage is from a moment in the interview at which Felice seems caught off guard by her emotional discomposure:

It's been very hard, people don't understand, and it's very hard for me to talk about it. I don't belong, I didn't go to a camp, I didn't suffer in that way, I don't have a number to show the pain, but see, I [here she begins to cry] I never had the parents. Why did they go? And there was nothing to show for it. [...] I couldn't bring myself to go to the World Gathering [in Jerusalem in 1981], because I felt that I'm not a survivor, I didn't go through a camp, but then I thought: I am a survivor, in my own way, my

⁴⁵ Note here that ... indicates a pause, while [...] indicates omission.

parents died, my whole family died, besides my sister everyone else is gone.⁴⁶

After the Gathering: forming a generational identity

Six years after the 1983 American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Jacques Fein gave an interview to the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony. This interview not only stressed the importance of the 1983 Gathering as a life-changing moment for Jacques, but also provided contextual detail that allows us to see why the Gathering had been so important to him. In it, he explained that he had begun thinking hard about his past the year before, prompted by what he called a “mid-life crisis”. He recalled that, through the 1960s and 1970s, “people always asked me what my parents were like, and I didn’t know anything,” a void at the centre of his life that had begun to feel like “an obsession” by the early 1980s. In 1982, Jacques wrote to his sister, who was then living in Jerusalem, to ask whether she had any information about their parents that he did not have. He was shocked when she sent back two family photographs. He recalled that, after receiving them, “the issues about where I came from really started coming into focus. Although it was happening in the previous five to ten years, it was 1982 that really...that was it.” Wanting to connect to others in this situation, he went with a friend to a survivors’ group, but “they were all camp survivors, and it was really difficult to relate to them, and for them to relate to us. Because from our point of view, we didn’t have any of that, and from their point of view, we didn’t really suffer.”

This motivated Jacques to attend the 1983 Gathering, where he observed that most attendees were camp survivors, and “there were very few people like myself.” Nonetheless, he recalled that two pivotal events took place at the Gathering: the first was his meeting with Felice Zimmern Stokes (and with other people who had spent time in OSE homes), and the second was the discovery of information about his parents’ deportation in Serge Klarsfeld’s *Mémorial*: “I met someone who asked about my parents, and I didn’t know anything, so this person took me to see the Klarsfeld book *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France*. The person said ‘do you know when they were sent?’, but I didn’t know anything except their last names. I went through every convoy until I eventually found the

⁴⁶ Felice Zimmern Stokes was interviewed twice at the Gathering: once in a joint interview with Jacques Fein and another attendee helped by the OSE, Paul Kassy, and again on her own. These quotes are taken from her individual interview: Felice Zimmern Stokes, interviewer unspecified, 12 April 1983, USHMM, RG-50.119*0137.

name Karpik. I found my father on page 38. [...] That was one of the emotional moments of my life, just seeing them on paper.”⁴⁷

The Gathering thus acted as a catalyst towards rethinking identity in two key ways, for Jacques and for other child survivors. First, it brought him his first concrete knowledge about the fate of his parents, and launched a period in his life during which he made great efforts to learn more about both their deaths and his own early life. In the year following the Gathering, Jacques travelled to France to meet the family who had rescued him during the war, whose name, remarkably, was indeed Bocahut – a major clue to his past that he had only vaguely remembered the year before. He also managed to obtain his OSE case records, which provided a wealth of factual information about his years in OSE orphanages. Second, the Gathering opened an opportunity to forge what would become lasting relationships with other child survivors. The conference made this possible in practical terms, as attendees were able to gather lists of others with similar backgrounds and who lived within a given region. In a more expansive sense, the conference was a moment during which many child survivors recognised, in meeting each other, the collective aspects of their life histories. In 1984, Jacques was one of the founders of a group for child survivors in the Washington-Baltimore area. He recalled that “the ’83 conference was the catalyst [for the group], because we got a bunch of names. But clearly, it was going to happen, because there were other people feeling the same way, people in their mid-40s starting to have their mid-life crises, because all I can tell you is that people in their mid-40s and early 50s who have lived with this...the best medicine is to get together and talk about it and somehow start to open up. To meet people who have had the same experience. You don’t have to explain to our group.”

In the wake of the 1983 Gathering, hundreds of similar groups for child survivors formed across the United States, Canada, the U.K., Australia and elsewhere, highlighting the transnational impacts of these changes across the Anglophone world.⁴⁸ If the oral histories gathered at the conference reflected a

⁴⁷ Interview with Jacques F., interviewed by Myra Katz and Froma Willen, 24 November 1991, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, Yale University Archives, HVT-862. All of Jacques Fein’s subsequent quotations in this section are from this interview.

⁴⁸ See, for example, the Shoah Visual History Foundation interview with Litzi Hart for an account of the establishment of the first of these groups in Australia in 1987, or the interview with Joanna Millan for an account of the formation of the first parallel organization in Great Britain around the same time. Interview with Felizitas (Litzi) Hart, 27 March 1995, interviewer Vanessa Ring, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, 1224; interview with Joanna Millan, 15 February 1998, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, 37960.

moment in which child survivors were first starting to reconsider the relationship between their pasts and their present identities as individuals, those carried out in the years following reflected the shift towards a collective understanding of a distinct “child survivor” generation. Like Jacques Fein, Felice Zimmern Stokes reflected, in two later interviews, on how the Gathering had cemented a sense of belonging to a wider group.⁴⁹ For her, this process took somewhat longer than it did for Jacques: it was not until the first International Gathering of Hidden Children, held in New York in May 1991, that she joined a child survivors’ group: “we formed a group, and we became very close, very attached. We recounted our experience, we talked about it, and that’s how it helped.”⁵⁰ When interviewed in 1993, Felice reiterated her frustration concerning the dismissal of child survivors, but with far more confidence than she had in 1983, using reported speech to encourage the listener to imagine both the dialogue and its emotional impact:

There was this Holocaust conference. I questioned whether I should go because I’d never been in a camp, I have nothing to show for it, I wasn’t in this camp or that camp and I used to want to have a number [tattooed on my arm] so I could show people the pain. I remember saying that I have nothing to show for what I went through, I have no number, they used to say “you were a child, what do you know? You don’t remember.” This is one of the things they used to tell me at the conference, “oh, you don’t remember.” This is why the [1991] Hidden Child conference was good: there was a pain there, but a different kind of pain. The pain of loss.⁵¹

If the “generational” aspects of this sense of belonging were implied in Felice’s narrative, other child survivors made the link overtly. Jacqueline Rosay (b. Jacqueline Rozencwajg in 1938 in Paris) had escaped into neutral Switzerland with the help of the French underground in 1943, and had spent the remainder of

⁴⁹ Felice Zimmern Stokes has given interviews to both the Yale Fortunoff collection and the Shoah Visual History Archive: see interview with Felice Z., interviewed by Joni Sue Blinderman, 30 December 1992, Fortunoff Visual Archive for Holocaust Testimony, Yale University Archives, HVT-2244; interview with Felice Stokes, interviewed by Rosalie Franks, 2 February 1998, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, 38777.

⁵⁰ Interview with Felice Stokes, Shoah Foundation VHA, 38777.

⁵¹ Interview with Felice Z., Fortunoff collection, HVT-2244. Felice also attended the second International Gathering of Hidden Children in Jerusalem in 1993. On the significance of the use of reported speech, see Deborah Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the war with a Swiss family. Her parents survived, but she did not resume living with them until 1948, after having accidentally been placed in an orphanage. Jacqueline recalls that attending the Gathering in Washington dramatically changed her own relationship with her past and with her parents' pasts. Her description of this transformation marks a particularly emotional moment in her interview: "[Attending the Gathering] was like a great burden was lifted from my shoulders. I felt such pride in being a Jew and [here she starts to cry] found such strength from the people I met there. [...] [Following this] I felt the need to meet with my own generation, I felt so alone, and you really feel the lack of people in your own age group, because so many were killed."⁵²

In 1985, Jacqueline began working with others to set up a group for child survivors in New York. Like Felice, she also attended and was deeply moved by the first Hidden Child conference in 1991. As was the case for Felice, this 1991 gathering marked a turning point for Jacqueline: she recalled that "it kind of brought everything together, because I've been working on this since 1983, and I feel I have now an understanding of how and in what way it formed me and influenced my behaviour, my beliefs, my values, and it also gave me a greater understanding of my parents: what they went through, their losses, their experiences, their relationship to me." As Jacqueline's testimony suggests, she – and many others – took a number of steps between the early 1980s and the early 1990s that fed into the development of a distinct, collective generational identity. The sense of being part of a collective experience in turn had profound consequences for individuals and for families. As Jacqueline suggested, this took work: psychic, emotional, intellectual, personal and collective. It was not enough for these child survivors to have shared the formative experience of having survived the genocide: to develop a sense of generational belonging, they had to work towards this consciously and collectively in their middle age. They had to learn to represent themselves as a distinct generation, and to use narratives of survival to frame their own life stories. Through this process they altered cultural representations broadly: we are now all familiar with the term "child Holocaust survivor".

Conclusion

Generations, Alistair Thomson writes, are historically contingent: "They are forged by shared experiences and emergent generational awareness in youth. They are fashioned and refashioned in memory by individuals who draw upon

⁵² Interview with Jacqueline R., interviewed by Dana Kline and Lucille B. Ritro, 13 June 1992, Fortunoff Visual Archive for Holocaust Testimony, Yale University Archives, HVT-1537.

generational identities to help them make sense of their lives. They are enacted and reproduced through collective assertions of generational interests and needs, and they are consolidated by collective representation of a common past and of a common generational identity.”⁵³ Thomson rightly reminds us that early shared experiences are a key component of “generations”, but they are not the only one. Members of a self-defined generation must have a subjective sense of collective belonging, and the work of forging this generational identity is itself deeply shaped by its own historical moment. This article has demonstrated that this moment of creation and consolidation can occur many years after the formative events that are often assumed to be the basis of generational understanding. While formative events are important, a shared process of remembering and narrating is more so, fired into action by a historical context that can emerge decades after the fact.

For child survivors, the formation of a generational consciousness was not just about claiming the identity of “survivors” for themselves – it was about exploring what it meant to survive in a fundamentally different way. Testimony such as Jacques Fein’s and Felice Zimmern Stokes’s suggests that such explorations sometimes predated the event, but there can be little doubt that the event accelerated and crystallised this reconfiguration. The Gathering provided a context and a moment in which child survivors began to fit their own life stories into a broader, changing story of who a Holocaust survivor could be, and what dimensions survival could assume. The historical moment of the Gathering, in the early 1980s, was the watershed point in and after which many child survivors – then in mid-life – began to see themselves as part of a distinct generational group.

Oral history is a powerful tool for shedding light on such processes of generation building. In the interviews recorded at the 1983 Gathering, we hear child survivor participants negotiating a moment of emotional dislocation and a sense of non-belonging, but we equally hear them taking steps towards rethinking the very meaning of their memories. In later reflections on the Gathering, interviewees offer insights into how the 1983 event opened up opportunities to forge inter-personal bonds, to reframe personal and collective narratives, and to engage in a different reading of a common past. These later interviews also shed light on how this process unfolded and was maintained over a period of years and even decades, allowing us an intimate window onto how “generations” are socially constructed by committed individuals and groups working in historically contingent circumstances.

⁵³ Alistair Thomson, “Australian Generations?” 85.