

Matthew Seidman Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation
Summer Internship 1995

Thank you for devoting your time and energy to Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. You will be assisting videographers in videotaping the firsthand testimonies of Holocaust survivors.

The participating survivors, many of whom have never told their stories before, will share personal accounts of living through the nazi regime in Europe and of how they escaped being murdered when so many did not.

You are participating in history. There has never been a video history project of this magnitude. The Foundation will be collecting testimonies throughout 16 regions worldwide and when complete will have the most comprehensive archive of survivor testimonies in the world. The testimonies will be used by historians, museums, researchers and educational institutions for generations to come.

This guide has been prepared to supply the information you will need to fulfill your vital role.

As a camera volunteer for Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation you will be scheduled to assist a videographer on two interviews per day, once or twice a week, depending on schedules and availability. The interviews will be scheduled by your Regional Coordinator, who will supply you with all pertinent information including date, location and time of the interview and the names of the videographer, interviewer and survivor for that particular day.

PRE FACE

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HOLOCAUST: MIDDLE ENGLISH DERIVED FROM OLD FRENCH HOLOCAUSTE STOP DERIVED FROM ECCLESIASTICAL LATE LATIN HOLOCAUSTUM, *A WHOLE BURNT OFFERING* STOP DERIVED FROM GREEK HOLOKAUSTON (NEUTER OF HOLOKAUSTOS), *BURNT WHOLE* STOP DERIVED FROM HOLOS, *WHOLE* (SEE HOLO-) + KAUSTOS *BURNT*: SEE CAUSTIC

CAUSTIC: MIDDLE ENGLISH CAUSTIK DERIVED FROM LATIN CAUSTICUS STOP DERIVED FROM GREEK KAUSTIKOS STOP DERIVED FROM KAUSTOS, *BURNING* STOP DERIVED FROM KAIEIN, *TO BURN* STOP SYNONYM SARCASTIC

SARCASM: LATE LATIN SARCASMOS DERIVED FROM GREEK SARKASMOS STOP DERIVED FROM SARKAZEIN, *TO TEAR FLESH LIKE DOGS, SPEAK BITTERLY* STOP DERIVED FROM SARX (GENITIVE SARKOS), *FLESH* STOP DERIVED FROM INDOEUROPEAN BASE TWERK-, *TO CUT* STOP FROM WHICH IS DERIVED AVESTAN THWERES, *TO CUT, WHITTLE*

THRESHOLD: MIDDLE ENGLISH THRESCHWOLD DERIVED FROM OLD ENGLISH THERSCOLD (AKIN TO OLD NORSE THRESKOLDER) STOP DERIVED FROM BASE OF THERSCAN (SEE THRASH)

NARCOTIC: MIDDLE ENGLISH NARCOTYKE DERIVED FROM OLD FRENCH NARCOTIQUE, ORIGINALLY ADJECTIVE STOP DERIVED FROM MIDDLE LATIN NARCOTICUS STOP DERIVED FROM GREEK NARKOUN, *TO BENUMB* STOP DERIVED FROM NARKE, *NUMBNESS, STUPOR* STOP DERIVED FROM INDOEUROPEAN NERK- STOP DERIVED FROM BASE (S)NER-, *TO TWIST, ENTWINE* STOP FROM WHICH IS DERIVED *SNARE, NARROW*

NARROW: MIDDLE ENGLISH NARWE DERIVED FROM OLD ENGLISH NEARU, AKIN TO MIDDLE DUTCH NARE, OLD SAXON NARU STOP DERIVED FROM INDOEUROPEAN BASE (S)NER-, *TO TURN, TWIST* STOP FROM WHICH IS DERIVED *SNARE*, GREEK NARKE, *STUPOR*

MAP: MIDDLE LATIN MAPPA (MUNDI), MAP (OF THE WORLD) DERIVED FROM LATIN MAPPA, *NAPKIN*, *CLOTH* (ON WHICH MAPS WERE PAINTED): STOP SAID (BY QUINTILIAN) TO BE OF PUNIC ORIGIN.; STOP PROBABLY DERIVED FROM TALMUDIC HEBREW MAPPA STOP DERIVED FROM MANPA, CONTRACTION OF MENAFA, A FLUTTERING BANNER . . . MAPPED, MAPPING STOP PUT ON THE MAP STOP WIPE OFF THE MAP STOP MAPPER

SWASTIKA: SANSKRIT SVASTIKA DERIVED FROM SVASTI, *WELL BEING*, *BENEDICTION* STOP DERIVED FROM SU, *WELL* STOP (DERIVED FROM INDOEUROPEAN BASE SU-, STOP VARIANT OF SWE-, SEWE-: SEE SUICIDE STOP) + ASTI, *HE IS* STOP: FOR INDOEUROPEAN BASE SEE *IS*

IS: MIDDLE ENGLISH DERIVED FROM OLD ENGLISH, AKIN TO GERMAN IST STOP DERIVED FROM INDOEUROPEAN ESTI STOP (FROM WHICH IS DERIVED SANSKRIT ASTI, GREEK ESTI, LATIN EST STOP) DERIVED FROM BASE ES-, *TO BE* + TI-, PROBABLY AN ENCLITIC PRONOUN STOP. THIRD PERSON SINGULAR PRESENT INDICATIVE OF *BE*

HEDY KAMM STOP DOROTHY YAHR STOP ROSALIA LENCZNER STOP
SIEGFRIED NUSSENBAUM STOP YVONNE LORBER STOP PAUL WEINER
STOP GEORGE BASS STOP ANNA BASS STOP SOL GOLDBERG STOP
JOACHIM LUWISCH STOP MICHAEL TAG STOP GINA LANCETER STOP
FRITZI SCHIFFER STOP JUDITH GOLDSTEIN STOP IRENE STERN STOP
ROSA WOLKIN STOP JAKOB WEINBERG STOP MARGUERITE LEDERBERG
STOP IRVING SHILOFF STOP ISABELLA RYBACK STOP SAMUEL KOYTMAN
STOP HERMAN HALLER STOP SALLY SACHS STOP

THIRD PERSON SINGULAR PRESENT INDICATIVE OF BE

I will learn the syntax and rhythm of grief, listen to the roar of the ocean of breath
with my ear to the shells of their hearts
This famine will be quenched, this smoldering cracked earth cooled mended,
inflated belly subside and quiet, fill

Here this hunger for the Tattoo
Here this hunger for the striped pants, the striped shirts
Here this hunger for the shaved and vermininfested heads
Here this hunger for the flaming smoking chimneys in dusk, in dawn, in noon
Here this hunger for *Gift Gas*
Here this hunger for the tale of slaughter, of suicide, of starvation and pure
human animal survival, pure
 human animal cruelty
Here this hunger for the bootheel of a killer in uniform to stomp upon the fault in
my heart, make it wide
Here this hunger for outrage, for rage, for tears, for what is unimaginable,
unthinkable, irrevocable, true
Here this hunger for This is Jewishness? For this is mine? For this I claim as
birthright and meaning prior to
 my birth and naming?
Here this hunger I want to see their faces
 I want to hear their voices break and stutter
 I want to own them
 Relegate them to a safe and eternally
unreachable place,

A cyberspace,
A story in a bar over coffee and tobacco,
A selfrighteous rented suffering vicarious and cool,
A poorly hidden loathing for their impertinent survival,
A terror of a suffering, a witnessing, a helplessness which maps the end of
language itself
 A speech which silences
 A remembering which annihilates recollection
 A presence which threatens the bricked-up sky, to expose its concealed
emptiness as
 mirror and replica of the human heart.

For volunteering is a *mitzvah* and I will be paid in currency of messianic sacrificial
shekels, secret heart,
 rapacious heart, heart of the Watcher chained by looking
For this will be a paper, "It will be a good paper" I said, I said, I said
For I will get credit, "I will get credit" I said, I said, I said
For it will be a good experience, "It will be a good thing to have done" I said, I
said, I said
For a Writer, for a Writer, for a Writer

I do not know this yet. How far identification will take me this summer. I do not know this yet, how the hunger for the sound of grief will grow. All I know is my heart turned, woken by a smell, and following I take the commitment.

The Shoah Project

05.16.95

I sit as witness to the camera-gutted speech of survival.
Barely bare walls, effigies of pets; photos in glass.
The Nazi war machine has led to the development of a
fluid and spontaneous software, connecting the written
word to the spoken, *Talmud Torah*, maps surface as if
called by breath.

Hedy Kamm, Dorothy Yahr. Mrs. and Miss.

Moments told of the moment the soft paper shell of
the world caught fire, convulsing like plastic in an ashtray.

Sitting as witness wonder: how could the universe have continued?

She said: Do you see, that smoke - it is your mothers and daughters burning.

She said: Make yourself older. Give yourself a number. To live.
Her forearm remains uninscribed.

From a train window a father is last glimpsed.

Because the children said "Grandma" a mother is swallowed into smoke.

No embellishment. No more said than this.

The wound is unspeakable, the event insurmountable.

How could the world not have caught fire and ended?

Skin around the neck free and weightless with forgetting. With
enduring. With amnesiac and unforgettable survival. With simply
What Is. Somehow, only what was.

Speaking of an officer who would drop a bread and cheese sandwich into her
camp

factory station drawer, a guardian angel dropped upsidedown into the
sadistic and tall form of a man, a Nazi; she sends the interviewer home

with bread and cheese from Zabar's.

What are they both devoted to? Work.

Why did you never marry? I felt every man was sorry for me.

I am here, in the crotch of history.

Witnessing, to bear witness, to create witnesses.

Hearing that which cannot be spoken, for it is borne upon the saying of the world.

Hearing what is not-spoken.

And hearing, witnessing, meeting, even in this, yes, in this, the saying of God.

Saying

Everything is permitted. Even mercy.

I ask:

What comes after anger?

She says: forgiveness.

She says: space.

Again, Rakhamim. (*Hebrew: 'mercy', the root of which is Rekhem, 'uterus'*)

Sweetness, here in the night garden, writing by the orange shield of the trouble light, hung by its hook on a clothes line.

Volkofsky, the mezuzah thief, reaches a left hand to the next threshold. Brief, imperceptible hesitation. Inside, the story merely describes itself. He listens. He is beginning to hear it; his listening becomes its hearing; his hearing becoming the mouth of the voice. What appeared as a doubling back, a doubling upon itself begins to be revealed as expression not listened to by the speaker. Revealing the second I, always thought to be the speaker's hearing itself, to be an Other I. This is a voice out of time, he hears. This is a voice falling into, upon, history, rain onto parched earth, not growing out of it. This is the voice of God, he hears.

That is not the sun, Dorothy. It is a very bright microphone.

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(First journal entry.)

The tactlessness of quoting myself in the "Internship Proposal". And yet contextually absolutely perfect. This the world of the detached I, the speaker speaking, and speech itself forming an electrified fence around the I, and the I of the story.

The long arc of History in which I am merely a point, an ellipse, I have begun to viscerally sense and wholly enter. *Sleep*. Just passing through, America.

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“Seidman I found out is not even my real name. My father’s father’s father came here young just before the turn of the century. He was educated, scholarly, but worked, here, in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. My grandfather was born, and before his fourth birthday his father, my greatgrandfather, was killed in a mining accident. My greatgrandmother remarried, a man named Seidman. The man who was killed, the educated miner, was named Abraham. Abraham Volkofsky. There are no Volkofsky’s in any of the New York City boroughs phonebooks. I am the only one. And in me, as well, the Name remains hidden.”

‘Hoop Dreams’ seen before the Shoah Project Internship began. And thinking, knowing I’d never seen the “Inner City” (as if it were closer to some sanctuary ((the Nothingness of the Almighty)) portrayed, revealed, uncovered, as Camp. From a moving wheeled-vehicle the pedestrians loom, arrive and rotate away, the desolation of immobility like a circle of ripples growing around them as the camera wheels away, and they grow small. Perhaps this is the symptomatic eye of the Twentieth Century, the unstopping disinterested eye of the document, the helpless observer behind a camera eye which is the sand of the lens pursued by fire into transparency, into the speed of invisibility, fighting fire by becoming absolutely without resistance to light: the speed, the motion of the camera wheel-vehicle is the last stance, the site without cartography of the Diasporic Century, the velocity without sound of the Information Highway, the waiting pause for an echo in Cyberspace; these interviews begin to be glimpsed from this same camera wheeled-vehicle, I begin to collect speed and distance under the guise of paper-work and responsibility, under the guise of professionalism and what is “necessary”; voice of the skeptic and the doubter, the critic of narrative flow and “interest”, of what is a “good” story and what not; who tells what well; judgment of depth of suffering, who warrants an interview and really doesn’t; hoping they don’t take more than four or five tapes, my time being precious? This the speed against the airless, lightless, motionless absolute inner chamber of the unthinkable, an attempt at stopping the avalanche which, the threshold of entry into this Holy languageless place, roars over me everytime these Survivors speak.

“What exactly is it that you do?”

I have to tell this part too. Although this is not what The Paper will be about. The Paper will be about Sleep. About Forgetting. About the Non-meeting of Buber’s. About the Face. But what you do is just tell them what you do. For cruelty is theft. What is stolen is The Word. Left behind is the massgrave trench, the Sarc-Chasm, the abyss of flesh from which The Voice, The Word, must be reminded. Again and again the World must be reminded, again and again the Buried Voice exhumed, again and again the Buried Book reopened and recited. Tell them what you do. It is The Newspaper Voice which breaks this silence, first. This happened. And then this. And the Rabbis say all living is a response to the Call. When do you hear the Call? When you respond.

Nobody dared say anything because we were afraid we would all be killed. On Wednesday morning I went outside to get water. Next to the fountain I saw seven of the boys with their throats cut, and two others hanging from a tree. The New York Times, Monday, July 17, 1995 on Srebrenica

They're separating the men and the women and the children again. This way and that way. Recite. Repeat. Repetition. Over coffee and a bagel, tears? In a cafe? Ah. This is how it could have happened. In fact, this is exactly how it happened. Over coffee and bagels in New York City, in Brooklyn, weighed weighed counted divided for ship bumpers, for lampshades, for soap, for slippers, for mattresses. But it is different. There were no pictures in the paper while it was happening. There was no outside documentation of the event as it happened. And these people are not being led to the gas chambers. They are not being made into salable goods. Their deaths are not being meticulously recorded as one records factory productivity. This is a step back to premodern hatred, vicious cruel and with Land as the object. This text hearkens back to the etymology of Map, the Banner fluttering in the wind, later in the blood-drenched evening the same Banner laid out across the table, wine and banquet-meat staining its cloth, forming the next day's boundaries, the next day's campaign. This is different.

The Jews became a metaphysical territory which had to be conquered body by body. Had to be erased. Had to be depopulated. This is the Modern age. *Lebensraum* When I can't find a seat on the subway it's not because there isn't any room on the train. It's the room inside. This is the modern age. The Jew's allegiance to the invisible. This had nothing to do with the Theophilosophical stance of Judaism. To say it did is giving too much consciousness, too much thought, too much acuity to this lunatic project of the Nazi's. And to say it didn't is not giving enough credit to the Jewish worldview. You are blaming the Jew for his suffering at the hands of another. No. No. No. But to deny there is in Judaism the sense of being the perfect, the only worthy target for injustice would also be false. It is the worldview of the refugee. Give thanks for the constantly changing ground beneath your feet. Is one seeking, or is one pursued? The Jew seems to be always between both currents of movement. It is the world directly on the boundary between nations. The suffering inflicted on the Jew is the suffering of the Other who is on either side of this boundary. And then, this boundary becomes simply the space between bodies. Here is the source of the rage of Auschwitz, of the fire of the crematorium, of language emptied of meaning, turned into simply another disguise for treachery, another code for silence, another herald hiding the announcement of death. This is the Century of Relativity. Of Relation. Of difference. This is not the same. This is for land, for an old tribal war. The Other was merely for death itself. This was the territory that was being sought. This was the boundary, directly upon which Hitler stood, this was his Land of Promise. I do not blame the Jew for his oppressor. But as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I am required to see the Holocaust as well fitting into the Book of the Jews. This is part of the

poem. I do not understand. There is nothing to understand. And I require this only of myself. Hebrew Rekhem: Uterus: The root of Mercy: This place of the Between-Boundary is the source of this violence, as well as this possibility of mercy. What could be more violent, and more merciful than being born? Great poem of Auschwitz: it is not God's help that we need, but it is God who needs our help. Theory of Relativity. Indelible scar of interdependence, protruding navel from a starving belly.

“What is it exactly that you do at these interviews?”

“I am an Assistant to the Videographer, the person who is filming the Interview with the Survivor. I usually meet the videographer at their home, having been given the location a day or two previously. The meeting time is in the morning, usually around seven or seven-thirty. I help carry the camera equipment, the lights, the tripods, the videotapes, the camera; I fill in all the required paperwork, who the Interviewer is, who the Videographer is, who the Survivor is; the date and location of the Interview, the time the interview begins and ends; labeling the videotapes so they can be archived; I fill out the slate, which opens the interview, describing the who, what, when and where of the interview, what the language is; I put the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the entry to the home; yes, all the interviews are conducted at the Survivor's homes, except when they are in from out of town or do not feel comfortable relating their experience in the intimacy of their living space.”

“That is an interesting idea.”

“Yes these stories, these words are sometimes being spoken for the first time since the events took place and the level of toxicity of the words sometimes makes it necessary for the Survivor to sell their home immediately after the telling of the Story. It has happened a number of times. Realtor's are extremely aware of this project. They have been doing well in some neighborhoods, particularly Queens and the Bronx. People who have lived in the stability of silence, rent stabilized since the second half of this century speak once and the rent on their living space quadruples overnight. Happened a number of times.”

“Is that true?”

“No, not at all. It is a complete and utter fabrication”

“Why?”

“Why. He asks Why. If you have to ask there is no reason to tell you. Just let me continue telling you what I do at these interviews, since it seems this is something you can at least make an attempt at understanding. I also. *I also*. I also turn off the refrigerator, unplug the phone, stop the clock from ticking, turn the airconditioner off, close the windows and the shades. I send the rest of the

family members out of the room and instruct them to make no noise whatsoever. I bring water for the Survivor to have at their side during the interview. Always say it's because the lights are hot, not because you may weep. I bring them tissues to have by their side during the interview. Always say it's because the lights are hot, not because you may weep. I unplug the phone turn off the refrigerator stop the clock from ticking. Do you understand? *Do you understand?* The Survivor is given a number, on the paperwork. The cameraperson is given a number. The interviewer is given a number. I am not. I help set up the lights, find the outlets, set up the chairs, sit in for the Survivor for purposes of lighting and framing and focus, I hold the slate for the first tape, which is like a cross between a hollywood slating and a booking process, a mugshooting. When the spoken testimony is finished the Survivor, if they choose, can have photographs of lost family members, parents, siblings, friends, places, houses, events, all these snapshots videotaped as well, for the purpose of widening the breadth of the retrieval processes of the Archive; I assist in the handling and setting up of these photographs, sometimes on a music stand covered in black felt, sometimes leaning up against an object the Cameraperson finds in the house, like, say, *a shabbos candleholder, say*; the photographs are shot, tight, panned from lost face to lost face while the survivor watches on the monitor, seeing in a way they have never seen, narrating the motion of the camera, saying Who and When and Where. Sometimes not just photographs but documents as well are shot: deportation papers, tax levy papers, identification papers showing the famous highest uppercase letter J; medals; occasionally a letter of reparation. But the photographs are most important, above and beyond the documents. For someone may not recognize a name, mentioned in the story, but a face often will open whole inroads of memory, which of course is the entire impetus behind the project. To preserve and instigate memory, to inhale the lungs with time past, to make the lost air breathable, to facilitate an amphibiousness on the part of the human heart which threatens to be thwarted from developing fully."

"Now what are you talking about."

"Listen. *Will you listen to me?* Do you hear that, that phrase? Do you know how to listen? I remember nothing of any of these interviews. They haunt me. They haunt me with an absence immediate and irrevocable. Instantly forgotten. They haunt me. *They haunt.* I left each interview day, completed the day with a helmet of air heavier than the earth itself closed and rotating slowly, steadily, inexorably, excruciatingly, crushingly around my head. I would watch the interview on the monitor, and the television was more real, more viewable, more comprehensible than the actual person in front of me, speaking. It was perversely difficult to tear my eyes from the screen at my feet and focus on the human being speaking. But I listened. *I listened.* I sat, I watched, I listened. Word after word, sentence upon sentence, story upon story, hearing the rhythm and the syntax of grief, of the inexpressible, the unthinkable, the unimaginable, the change of the breath from easy, starting at the home, the family, the town,

the village, the shtetl, the friends, the recollected smells and sounds and light and air and music and shul and food and laughter and loss, natural, lifetime loss, breath easy, words flowing and soft and effortless with interest, with the *in* of the inter-esse, the inside-being, the *Is*. *Third person present singular indicative of Be*. Hear. Okay. He is. She is. And then would come the change. *We want 20% pre-war, 20% post war, and about 60% of the interview to be about the time during the war*. About. *Because they know. They know. It adds up to more than there is. The incalculable. The uncontainable. The voice within the voice. The book within the book. Do you understand?* Then comes the change. The breath shortens, the syntax stiffens, braces and lurches, the gaze searches beyond the interviewer's face; the mouth forms the shape of a wheel, the face becomes the slope of a shoulder heading into a storm. I listened. I did. I know I did. And I forget everything. Everything. *Everything.*"

I envied the existence of a dog.

The finest musicians in Europe, POW's, played as we marched from Auschwitz to work.

My brother was two years older than me. I came into the house and he was crouching in a corner of the room, next to a sofa. I was his favorite. His little sister. "They are going to kill me. You will survive," he told me. He was thirteen years old. And he was right.

We got to Radensbruck and I see all these people, dressed in stripes, like pajamas. We didn't know if it is man or woman. It looked like a czirkus.

I remember like today.

Hermann was the surgeon's name at Buchenwald. In real life he was a butcher by profession.

My father's last words to me were "Always wrap tfillin."

My father told me, crying, my father was crying, I had never seen this, he said "They will be saying 'Shema Yisroel' longer than they will be saying 'Heil Hitler'".

Everytime I take a shower what is going to come out of the showerhead I still never know.

Shaved us wherever is possible a hair to grow.

We would fight over a piece of soap when there was not enough water to drink.

You learned you had to lay on your left side when you were sleeping, because it was so crowded many people had their hearts stop while they slept.

Liberation was the second worst day of my life, after my mother's death. Because I had survived, and there was nothing left.

Many nights I wake him up, he screams.
But I don't remember why I'm screaming.

You suffer enough and then the light goes on.

My mother, she make stocks, fur feet, she make mit un niddle, this.

The world is a gut world, it is the people who spoil it.

People were grabbing things out of my hands. I would walk down the street and people would take things out of my hands. I must have been three or four.

They bicycled off at night. I never saw them again.

I pretended to be a German, a Jew-hater. I said terrible things. To survive.

She cooked a potato with me and I knew my father was dead. Only something that large would warrant playing with food.

My father was afraid to protect me. And these boys were urinating on me.

You hate someone you don't sleep at night.

He hit me so hard I *flew*, I flew across the room. And forty-five years later, where that SS man hit me turned into a brain tumor. I had surgery five years ago. They got it all. I'm fine now.

"Do you understand ? I forget. Everything. Everything. *Everything.*"

"When you are in the womb they say you know the entire Torah by heart. And when you are born an angel taps you on the mouth and you forget everything. The whole thing. This is why we don't call Moses *Saint* or *Priest* or *Messiah*. Why we call him *Moshe Rabbenu*, *Our Teacher Moses*. Forgetting is the gift of God. For if we did not have this gift, we would be in constant fear of our own deaths. We would attempt nothing. And so the angel of remembrance and the angel of forgetting reside on each of our shoulders, one tapping our reciting lips, then the other. It is these angelic caresses which are the systole and diastole of our hearts. As Jabès quotes his Reb Kabr: 'Man and death form an exemplary

couple. Half mortal, half eternal.' Our hearts already work on this divine unitary principle. *For this is how we live.*"

It is old. It is so so old. Seventytwo years on earth, never a word spoken about the time in the camps, and here I am, listening, forgetting, terrified, expecting instant death; whose is not even clear. She sits on the couch. Sighing. Softly, girlishly, pleadingly moaning. "My Gott. O mine Gott." Quietly: "Am I having a heart attack?" Softly: "What is happening to me?" Pleading, in a low, hoarse whisper: "Please. Please help me." She keeps making the sound of vomiting, a heave that expels nothing. She could not finish the interview. She opens her mouth, to vomit, points into her throat. She makes the sound. The buried book. The lost word. Up from the depths comes the terror again, and this woman, whose daughter implored her to do the interview, ends up on her living room floor, laying on her side, an arm stretched out stiff, another raised to her Queens rowhouse ceiling, begging for help. I am here. Now I know. I am here, in the Camp. This is how it is. How people survived. Suddenly it is the violence of merely being in situ, anywhere at any time. Of having a body and inhabiting space, Here is revealed as the root of the terror. Time drops away: the interviewer, who pushed her to keep talking, as if it would be for the best, for everybody involved; "I want to stop. Please let me stop." "We will. Just five more minutes." The cameraman, Columbia grad with one ear, full of the insidious charm of the childpornographer; The Survivor, laid out on the floor, moaning, petitioning the earth for succor, for silence, for release from the prison of the Spoken Word: from the Unspoken Word; and me, notetaker, voyeur, fourth angle of the triangle, fourth-wall of brick covered with eyes: time stops, falls away, and there is no space between any of us out into which an arm of assistance could be reached; what is is revealed as a state of paralysis, an unbearable resistance to an even, relentless, retreating suction into which thought and light itself seem to be being pulled; there is a hesitation, as if what is before me would tense, vibrate and explode; as if something beneath were straining to be revealed. The camera is off. Unlidding our eyes. Her daughter is at the threshold, calling out her mother's name. We pack up, The Survivor, she gone into her room and behind a halfclosed door and on her bed, breathing. We are afraid to say goodbye. We leave. It is old. So so old. How one never sees someone again.

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The photographs. I know these faces. My entire body responds with recognition, and I feel the reality of *the tribe*. History is real. This simple thought, this simple, obvious knowledge, has completely and irrevocably altered the vision of my eyes. Where I start and where I end has been changed. Expanded yet narrowed. *Who we are and how we come to be here*. I sit in Penn Station waiting for a train. Families walk by. They seem to be four or five versions of a single face, whose original has been lost. *I know this sound / the engine in the dark* At the Holocaust Memorial in DC I saw your face in the tower of Faces of the Dead. In a house in the Bronx in a picture from Lodz, 1938, I saw Maura Minsky's face, the Regional Coordinator. Somewhere my own face has been lost, waits to be seen, found, reidentified. *We ourselves were lost, gassed, burned, buried. Is this also part of the call? Gift of ourselves across distance. Knowing we are, because we already once were?* Old. So so old.

The Torpor

Sleep.

I've shut all the windows. *The microphones are extremely sensitive. As much ambient noise as possible must be silenced.* Closed the airconditioner. Unplugged the fridge. The wall mounted pendulum clock has been stopped, a gentle finger placed in the way. Nine-seventeen AM. Or. Three-fourteen PM. The phone is off the hook. *No one can get in here now. We, for a time, are not in the world. You are participating in history.*

"We're ready."

The Interviewer begins: "Can you tell me your name?"
"Can you spell that?"

We, the cameraperson and I, sit, begin to settle in, give each other a look of camaraderie, I and this person I have never met before. It is the look exchanged by strangers at the start of an amusement park ride which is designed to petrify. *You and I.* They adjust focus, sound, frame, angle. I attempt to sit without allowing the chair to make its ancient, houseworn noise. Okay. Now we've begun. The story is still in the Pre-War era, family. "What was a regular day like?" "What kind of Jewish life was there?" "Did you experience any kinds of anti-Semitism?" Listen, watch, prepare. Try not to attract the Survivor's eyes to my own, to prevent them from looking at someone off screen. The camera is the Interviewer. Basic *Current Affair, 20/20* stuff. "I saw Spielberg on Barbara Walters, talking about the project you're doing. Sounds like a really great thing." "Yeah. Yeah it is." Now we are moving. The ghetto has been made. The deportations have begun. A parent has disappeared. A store has been looted, burned. A whispering is echoing through the community. Something unthinkable has been witnessed.

It is not the lights. It is not the closed windows. It is not the silenced airconditioner. It is not the waking up at five. It happens only when they enter the War, the ghetto, the camps. Before and after I am here. When they get to the War, to the horror, I sleep.

What do you mean you sleep? You fall asleep during the interview?

I nod. A thick, irrepressible torpor overflows me. As if I have been driving for fourteen or seventeen hours. I nod. Narcotic-style. Their story is chopped into disconnected phrases, and basically I begin to hear only the sounds of their voices, I am fallen away from the meaning of their words like a skydiver from the body of the plane. I fight it. Everytime. And then suddenly I am woken by shouting. And it is just the voice of the Survivor, speaking normally, as before.

Countless times my pen has fallen out of my hands, onto the floor. I stand. I leave the room. I try to walk it off. Soon as I sit back down to listen again, there I go, nodding like I just shot a load of dope. And everybody says, "It's a defense." Yes. Perhaps. But against what? The suffering of their story, against their experience? Perhaps. But I put less stock in the quality of my empathy. But this narrow, narcotized place: this is where history is generated. Outside of time. In a room with no access. This way out, please. This at least I understand. That space between a word and itself. This is the space we emerge from. Cannot know it has been entered. It only is when left. I don't know why I'm the only one who sleeps. Other people have mentioned getting drowsy. But no one else seems to sleep.

It is not philosophy which closes your eyes. It is not the Zwischen, the between, which lowers your head to your chest. It is not the room with only Exit which drops the pen to the floor. It is Identification. For this summer, you, too, have found the space excavated by speech. The space to survive.

Pass through the field of Poppies to end up at Home, Dorothy. There is that place, a place of memory which, to face, face to face, creates in You the fear of death. Of dying. Of Your end. A moment when powerlessness defined the route Your life would inexorably take. A moment when You had no choice. When circumstance, and circumstance alone carved out the form of Your soul. Sixteen years it has taken to approach that moment with the weapon of Voice, of language, of Speech. And suddenly there is Space, again. And although that moment, that ineradicable moment which is and forever will delineate the boundary of Your I, Your *Is*, still remains unFaceable, impossible to conceive without the fear, the mortal fear of End, *Baruch Hashem, Blessed Be the Name*, by speaking Life has become New, again, and that Place a part of You. A part. Look at these Survivors. They are all alive, fifty years later. Some of them Survived, and some of them didn't. The ones who never talked Survived less. Can see it in their faces, in the furniture of their Homes, in how they speak of the War after the War, in how they predict the future. In the sleep which overwhelmed you a voice was forming which later you would hear, later, in the summer. You were not sleeping. You were listening to the Place of Speech. Where anger coagulates, platelet by platelet, cell by cell, and gradually forms teeth. *To tear flesh like dogs*. Or, to praise. To thank. To bless. And. *To burn*. This summer healed You. This sleep of History awakened You. The Horror of human cruelty loved You. The anguish of human survival embraced You. And the Gift of the Meeting changed You. You have fallen in Love.

The Holocaust is the Ark of my fathers, which preceded them, shoulder-borne casket of The Unpronounceable heralding their progress through the wilderness towards the Promise. Language surrounds it, but cannot enter it. Atlases, Histories, Eyewitness accounts, Visual Histories, Archives, Projects, Poems, Refutations, Trials, Plays. These form a fence around it. *A fence around the Torah*

The human heart is born broken. *To learn to live in the break.*

Hurry, hurry, grab the kids, it's time for Holocaust Radio. And on the way home, from Montclair, or was it?, every passing driver I put a bullet through their head.

I dove head first through the cattle car window, my parents assisting me on their way to die, and as I leapt a Nazi gunner atop the train put a bullet in my left thigh, I hit the railside gravel with the top of my head and saw the sun. I opened my eyes and it was night, I walked along the tracks, hundreds of corpses along it. Yes. I walked. You can, you understand. And on and on and on, more babies flattened against concrete and eaten by dogs, a rabbi shot, hung in the slaughter house and covered with Carne Kosher. And on and on and on and on.

I resist the torpor, my bowels rebel. Place a New Jersey washcloth against my blowhole to stifle the explosion. Follow the long twisted road of the lower intestine, blow shit into a private tube with a little baby's mother and father waiting for the key, to shoot dope. Someone take this baby away? Yes, J-----? Me, take me away, overflow of menace and murder and words falling short into the fruitless ears of listening. G---L---, F---S---, D---C---, S---L---, I---F---. Past the torpor is just pain.

Waking at five.

Such refined communication, wordless sex. A muscle raised an eighth of an inch a begging, lowered, a refusal, a waiting, a future; the skin bursts into shades and you can watch a person disappear, held in your arms. A hunger followed by quiet words, into the curved basin of the summer night pours cool blue air, bird sounds, catcries, footsteps ringing high past the world. Quiet infinity, between stories.

(Journal 06.27.95)

One man, whose name I withhold, through whose terrible story I nodded and held back tears, at whom perversely I laughed because he called his toes 'fingers'; who wept through the entire three and a half hours of his testimony: he I will never forget. Smiling between cassettes, during breaks, offering gingerale and cookies and coffee; during the taping his face was absolute grief. Weeping. Lips showing teeth in anguish. The lost face. Unbearable to see. Unforgettable.

He I often remember. From him eventually there will be something I learned. I know this. *This too, I hear.*

He says *You're placing your center in a mortal body again* He says *One that's not Your own*
He says *Don't You remember That house was condemned, destroyed That was how You forced her to leave*

I know I say But please let me enjoy this for a little while
I will cling to You I say With all my heart with all my soul with all my might
Allow this brief between I say I have found a woman I love
When I look in her eyes I say Your hands why they hold me firmly gently
The ribs which cage my heart are soothed I say You must know this You have removed the terror from behind
my gaze
When I look in her eyes I say I know the brief pause wherein You dwelled before You spoke the world into Time

He says *That is when Death too began its dying*

I know I say This too I know when I look in her eyes Could You not find any other hands but Death's to offer the gift of love?

He says *It was by those same hands it was offered to me*
He says *The world I created I could not enter*
He says *And so exile became the place of love*
He says *As soon as I spoke I was doomed to memory*
He says *And my exile is made painful when You look in her eyes*

Don't you know I love You I say Because You left I have space wherein to look upon her To meet her To miss her To want her

*That You left I say Is proof of Your love
That You are absent I say Is proof of Your care
When I look in her eyes I say I and You, exiles, make brief return
And the earth of exile beneath Our feet, briefly, becomes home*

I will not turn away I say

He says When You look in her eyes, I too I say I will not turn away

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He enters, barefoot, stage right. He wears only the striped pants. His head is shaved. His eyes large with hunger. He does a birdlike, reverential ritual dance, knees drawing high, arms pleading, obsequious, desiring. A hand covers his eyes, briefly. An arm folds over his flat belly, he bows. There is a pile of earth, an empty glass on its side. He fills the glass with the earth. Stands it up. He tears a strip of cloth from his pantsleg, wraps it around the glass, covering it. He lays the glass on its side, as before, now wrapped. Once again he raises his arms to the sky, utters an inaudible blessing, claps his hands together, presses them to his chest. An embrace. Barefoot, he steps upon the glass, smashing it. His foot bleeds.

“Mazel tov,” he says. “Now we are married.”