Compassionate Storytelling with Holocaust Survivors: Cultivating Dialogue at the End of an Era

Chris J. Patti
University of South Florida, cjpatti@gmail.com

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Compassionate Storytelling with Holocaust Survivors:
Cultivating Dialogue at the End of an Era

by

Chris J. Patti

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Science
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Carolyn S. Ellis, Ph.D.
Arthur P. Bochner, Ph.D.
David A. Payne, Ph.D.
Ambar Basu, Ph.D.
Maria Cizmic, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
June 21, 2013

Keywords: Holocaust survivors, personal storytelling, ethnography, interpersonal communication, dialogue

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Salomon Wainberg, Larry Davis, and my father Walter A. Patti, Jr. Each of these people shared their stories with me and has influenced my life more than words can express. My father, Walt (or Pat as his friends called him), was a storyteller who gave me the storytelling bug as a kid. His nickname for me was “Wise Owl,” and he always believed in and supported my dreams and imagination. Through his life and death, Dad gave me a sense of purpose, adventure, passion for life, and stories to tell. I know he’d be proud of me as I finish my doctorate.

I met Larry and Roberta Davis in Long Beach, California in 2006. At that time, Larry was a cancer survivor who had been labeled “terminally ill” for a decade. He and Roberta shared their love for each other and life with me. He shared his story with me as well and was the main character in my first ethnographic project. I’ll never forget the wisdom he spoke with—even when he lost the ability to speak. I won’t forget his turquoise rings either.

Sal Wainberg and his wife Sandy were my first collaborators on this project. Sal’s wisdom, unending search for meaning in his life, and willingness to connect with me are the heart of this dissertation. I am forever grateful to Sal, Sandy, and the Wainberg family and hope this document pays some small tribute to his life and voice and what we all have to learn from listening to him and each other.
Acknowledgments

I’d like to acknowledge Dr. Carolyn Ellis, who has guided and facilitated my journey through this project and my doctoral studies. She has believed in me, treated me as a colleague, and always encouraged me to follow my bliss in life and research. She is more than an advisor—she is family. I must thank my mom, Lori Lynch. You gave me the strength and compassion to tell personal stories by telling your own. Thanks also to my brother Jeff Patti for sharpening my ideas about life, art, and communication. And thanks to Beck for her love and support—and for sticking with me.

I’d like to acknowledge Manuel Goldberg, Rachel Rivlin, and Sonia Wasserberger for making this project possible, as well as every Holocaust survivor with whom I had the honor of speaking. Thanks to Dr. Mark Greenberg and all those who worked on the Florida Holocaust Museum and University of South Florida Libraries Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center’s Oral History project. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Henry Greenspan for believing that I was, in fact, interviewing Holocaust survivors. I’d like to thank Hank for our ongoing conversation, his close readings and editorial advice, and for offering me a place to stay while presenting research in Canada. I offer my sincere thanks to Drs. Arthur Bochner and Marc Rich for supporting and shaping my perspective on telling ethnographic narratives and focusing on humane voices. I’d also like to thank Drs. David Payne, Ambar Basu, Maria Cizmic, and Tamara Zwick for their wisdom and help in realizing this project.
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Abstract

We live in a frantic, fractured, ever-quickening, and violent world that is at the end of the era in which we will be able to talk with survivors of the Shoah. To date, there have been approximately 100,000 recorded interviews of Holocaust survivors. The vast majority of these interviews—such as the 52,000 done for Steven Spielberg’s and USC Shoah Foundation Archive—have used traditional, single-session, and “neutral” methods of oral history interviewing to “capture” and “preserve” the legalistic, historical “testimonies” of survivors. The present study responds to this situation and unique moment in time by slowing down, listening, speaking repeatedly and intimately, forming interpersonal relationships, and storytelling with three Holocaust survivors in the Tampa Bay area: Salomon Wainberg, Manuel Goldberg, and Sonia Wasserberger. I do this in order to see those I work with as experiential authorities able to help me address the classic and post-modern issues of human meaning, connection, and value in the post-Holocaust world. I first contextualize this work within extant and related research in the field of communication. Then I situate this project in the broader intersections of work on the history of the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors. This is followed by an outline of the particular collaborative oral history and ethnographic theories and methods that influence this work. These contexts lead to three chapters, the ethnographic stories of each survivor I have worked with for the past three years. Each story focuses on: a) the oral history and ethnographic significance of sharing particularities of each survivor’s
experience through our dialogues together; b) broader insights and explorations of the central themes (compassion, identification, and affinity) that emerged from our interviews and relationships. The final chapter concludes by reflecting on and synthesizing the values and limitations of this project. As a whole, this dissertation cultivates and exemplifies: a) a unique understanding of humane and humanistic approaches to ethnographic methods in the fields of communication and oral history; b) compassion, identification, and affinity as important lenses and motives to consider in research with individuals (in particular individual survivors of mass atrocities); c) the historical value and need to continue developing diverse approaches to scholarship that centralize personal stories, dialogue, peace, wisdom, and work that represents marginalized experiences and experiences of marginalization in a violent, oppressive world. This dissertation is offered as a token of remembrance of the Holocaust and to those who shared their stories with me.
Chapter One:
Introduction, Justification, and Overview

Communication and the Holocaust

A genuine interview with a Holocaust survivor may be a relatively rare thing.

(Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006, p. 439).

While this dissertation is complex and multi-layered/vocal, delves into the lives, memories, and stories of individual Holocaust survivors, and connects broadly to the fields of communication and history, it is based on a simple idea: ethnographic communication scholars who focus on cultivating dialogic relationships in our interactions and writing ought to bring much to the praxis of “genuine” interviewing with Holocaust survivors. This project examines survivors’ stories and storytelling about their experiences during and since the Holocaust using engaged, relational ethnographic interviewing and writing. Over the past three years I have met with three Holocaust survivors and their closet family members multiple times in a variety of situations in order to build relationships in which we feel comfortable and desire to share intimate experiences and memories—theirs, mine, and ours together—in collaborative ways.

My goal was to use my background in communication to engage in genuine interviews with Holocaust survivors, interviews that are meaningful to those I work with,
and, possibly, meaningful at more general levels as well. Over the course of talking with these individuals and writing this document, I got much more than I could have hoped for. I was humbled and overwhelmed by the heart, wisdom, intimacy, love, loss, and relationships we created with each other. This point—the point of my dissertation—was brought home just days ago, on Friday, June 21, the day of my dissertation defense. The Holocaust survivors I worked with attended this scholarly ritual (see Figure 2.3) and each said to me, “We’re not here as participants. We’re here as family.” The feeling was mutual.

This project is important for a number of reasons: First, the youngest survivors of the Shoah are in the late stages of life. Many of these survivors have not traditionally been considered Holocaust survivors (because they were so young at the time) and have not been interviewed before. Furthermore, those who were hidden during the Holocaust, like the three main survivors with whom I spoke, also have been delegitimized when compared to camp survivors (“those with numbers tattooed on their arms”). Second, the survivors with whom I work have devoted much of their lives to understanding and living with their Holocaust experiences and memories. They each have unique riches of experiential wisdom gleaned from looking back and making sense of their lives over a lifetime (Freeman, 2010). Now, in the last years of their lives, each of these participants has expressed a passion and commitment to sharing what they have learned in order to contribute: a) to collective understandings of human experience in the face of the Holocaust; b) to their own personal understandings of their lives during and since.

Third, while more than 100,000 interviews of Holocaust survivors have been conducted and archived worldwide, collaborative work with survivors is rare in
academia, and most of what has been done in this realm has occurred only recently (see, for example: Ellis, 2012; Ellis & Rawicki, 2012, forthcoming; Greenspan, 1998; Rubin & Greenspan, 2006; Patti, 2012, forthcoming; Thompson, 2003). Fourth, communication scholars seldom have studied the Holocaust and, when we do, we tend to focus on critical/cultural aspects of the representation and aftermath of the atrocity. Examples include: analyzing the discourse of Nazi ideology, Hitler, and anti-Semitism (Burke, 1939; Bytwerk, 1983; 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010; Schwartzman, 1996, 2009); the memory and popular/historical representations of the Holocaust in American culture and film (Ehrenhaus, 2010; Owen, 2010); the rhetorical and polysemic nature of Holocaust memories (Hasian, 2001); and the relationship between photographic representation and collective remembering—and forgetting—of the Holocaust (Zelizer, 2000). Surprisingly, there is a shortage of scholarship in communication that works directly with and focuses primarily on Holocaust survivors themselves.

Bartesaghi & Bowen-Perlmutter (2009) have conducted a critical review of institutionalized and authoritative acts of remembering that occur between interviewers and Holocaust survivors. The authors deconstruct the discursive concepts of “the Holocaust,” “survivor,” “interviewer,” and “witness” (among others), by “questioning exchanges during interviews conducted with survivors and their children by the Transcending Trauma Project at the Council for Relationships” (p. 225). They also examine interviews done by Yale’s Fortunoff Video Archive and USC’s Shoah Foundation Archive in their analysis.

Bartesaghi & Bowen-Perlmutter (2009) argue that interviewers and interviewees jointly construct meaning through their “talk” (p. 225) and the interview dynamic. Their
work highlights the benefit of taking a micro-qualitative focus (critical discourse analysis in their case) on even single lines of interviews. The researchers determine that “Holocaust survivor” is a membership category and that through the interviewing process epistemic claims are made about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of memory, the individuals involved, and the institutional, socially constructed context and history of the Holocaust generally. Bartesaghi & Bowen-Perlmutter (2009) show that the category of “Holocaust survivor” is “re-membered” (p. 223) and reified through interviews and that this membership category comes with duties and moral obligations. My work adds to these lines of inquiry by flipping the script, through acts of getting involved in the messy, embodied, relational, and discursive/dialogic processes of conducting interviews with Holocaust survivors themselves.

Communication scholars who employ compassionate ethnographic methods and also consider the rhetorical and discursive aspects of human action offer a perspective that centralizes interpersonal communication, relationships, dialogue, conversation, and the aesthetics and ethics of representation and storytelling (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Cissna & Anderson, 2004; Goodall, 2000; Payne, 2006). In particular, my work brings a dialogic ethnographic approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2008; Goodall, 2000) that is uniquely situated between the humanities and social sciences. As I argue below, my perspective fits well within the current trajectories of Holocaust studies that: a) concern the relationship between “History,” memory, and literature (Langer, 1975, 1991; Young, 1988); b) focus on present-day, situated, aesthetic, ethical, and humanistic considerations of Holocaust history and survivor testimony (Hartman, 2006; Kushner, 2006). My background in

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1 As opposed to exploring these questions by examining pre-existing interviews.
rhetoric and ethnography, underlying focus on suffering/compassion, and use of
storytelling and personal experience put me in a unique position to communicate as a
sensitive, engaged interviewer.

I also have conducted eleven videotaped, historically archived, and publically
available interviews (and eleven non-recorded pre-interviews) over the past three years,
as part of the University of South Florida Libraries Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Center’s oral history project in coordination with the Florida Holocaust Museum². This
project was headed by Drs. Carolyn Ellis and Mark Greenberg. These interviews helped
me develop the experience and historical sensibilities necessary to refine my style and
methods of working more compassionately—in ongoing, audio-recorded, and
conversational ways—with Holocaust survivors Salomon Wainberg, Manuel Goldberg,
and Sonia Wasserberger. A telling story from my work with Sal Wainberg³ helps to
illustrate the issues at stake and why I adopt such an approach to working with Holocaust
survivors.

A Telling Story: “Telling Washes My Soul”

Polish hidden child survivor of the Holocaust Salomon Wainberg was married to
his wife Sandy for nearly a decade before he first told her of his experience. She always
sensed he had a “dark secret” but never pried, because she was afraid and thought it
might hurt him too much to talk about it. Yet, in 1973, on a plane ride back to Poland
with Sandy, on a “vacation” to visit Sal’s birthplace, his story came out on its own. On

² Information and all the interviews for this project can be found here:
http://lib.usf.edu/hgsc/collections/digital-collections/. My eleven archived interviews for this project can be
found here:
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/do/search/?q=author_lname%3A%22Patti%22%20author_fname%3A%22
Chris%22&start=0&context=1022861.
³ A more complete story of working with Sal makes up chapter four of this dissertation.
that flight Sal was racked by irrational fears of being drafted into the Polish army upon his return home. The strong, stoic, often closed-off man Sandy had married transformed before her eyes. His memory took hold and took him back to his childhood and, over their eight hour flight, Sal’s story first came out. It scared both he and Sandy, unsettled them to the core.

Twenty-seven years later, in 2000, Sal began to want to tell his story publically and started speaking at the Florida Holocaust Museum. Becoming a teller of his story fueled him in a way he had never experienced. Through speaking publically he felt he was able to both figuring out some of the formerly unspeakable shadows, ghosts, and mysteries of his past and pass along the moral of his story to a younger generation. Sal “no longer had time for tennis” and dedicated the remainder of his life to telling his story publically, hundreds of times all over the Tampa Bay area. Sal went from being closed-off and silent about his experience to becoming an inspired, open storyteller. I don’t think he’s alone in this transformation, and I think we all have a lot to learn from how and why this happens. I think the moral of Sal’s story speaks to the entire human story of making sense of the senseless in a still-genocidal post-Holocaust, post-modern world.

Upon learning about his story of becoming a storyteller I asked Sal, “What motivates you to tell now?”

“Telling brings me more than relief,” he said. “It washes my soul.”

To me Sal speaks to the heart of narrative theory with this line, to why it is we share our stories. I don’t think Sal was suggesting that his soul was any dirtier than any of ours—that it needed any more washing than any human soul (if there is such a thing). On the contrary, what I hear in Sal’s words are the meaning-making and transformative
potential that can occur through acts of storytelling. Sal suggests and demonstrates the cleansing and sense-making that can happen, even of some of our most difficult experiences, even of experiences of surviving the Holocaust. Yet, like so many other survivors, Sal didn’t begin to tell his story until decades after the events.

My experience attending the 2010 Lessons and Legacies Conference on the Holocaust—considered the top academic conference for Holocaust study and research by insiders in the field (Weiss, 2012)—confirmed that there is some historical debate about when survivors began speaking publically about their experience and when “we” as a culture began listening (Horowitz, 2012). Consider, just as one example, the survivor testimonies that were given early on, such as David P. Boder’s 1946 interviews with survivors in refugee camps in France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany (Paul V. Galvin Library, 2009). In addition, Jewish survivors often spoke of their experiences within their families and local communities, and there was considerable historical and news coverage of the events in the years that followed the Holocaust (Michlic, 2012). Sources such as these, however—in particular the interviews of Boder—have yet to reach full academic or public recognition (Rosen, 2012). Because of this, Holocaust scholars generally agree that the stories of survivors went largely unheard and untold in legal, cultural, and historical discourses in the three decades that followed the atrocities (Hartman, 2006; Herf, 1997; Kushner, 2006; Rudof, 2006; Stein, 2009; Weiviorka, 2006). As Herf (1997) argues, the term “Holocaust” as meaning the genocide of European Jewry “was not commonly used in German, as in American, public discussion until the 1970s” (p. 398).

Over the past forty years, though, there have been numerous waves of Holocaust survivor “testimony,” witnessing, and storytelling. Building from the most recent waves,
my project is not focused on the legalistic, historical evidence of the Holocaust that the word “testimony” implies. Instead, I am interested in the humanistic, humane, and relational undertones that “storytelling” connotes and the motive underling why Sal tells, *to wash his (our) soul(s).*

**Research Questions:**

RQ 1: How can we innovatively and compassionately listen to and collaborate with Holocaust survivors at the end of an era?

RQ 2: What can we learn from collaborating, over multiple interviews and across an extended period of time, with individual Holocaust survivors?

RQ 3: How might individual Holocaust survivor stories and acts of relational storytelling relate to broad cultural, historical exigencies in a still-violent world?

**Dissertation Keystone: The Relational Logic Behind the Questions and Stories**

Undergirding these central research questions my dissertation aims to address the philosophical study of values, or, in Greek, *axiology.* That is, I am interested in the motives, morals, ethics, aesthetics, meanings, and qualities of personal stories of suffering/compassion and why we tell them.

My assumption, based on my embodied experience and reading literature on memory, suffering, and Holocaust survivor testimony, is that history is a consciously and unconsciously moral endeavor, and that humans use symbols that are charged with *meanings* (situated and plural) to understand our worlds, communicate, record, and represent our individual and collective histories (Burke, 1984; White, 1980). The research questions I ask are qualitative and humanistic. To address them, I go to the individual experiences of those I work with, in relation to my experience (Crawford, 1996) and the
historical record, in order to tease out questions of value. Narrative theorists argue that stories are vehicles of value, ethics, and aesthetics (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 2001, 2009; Coles, 1989, Frank, 1995; Pirsig, 1974). Language theorist Kenneth Burke (1945, 1950, 1957, 1961, 1966, 1984) sees in human symbolic action—in drama and storytelling broadly construed—ways to explore overlaps between ethics and aesthetics (what is “beautiful and right” and what is “ugly and wrong”). I take this theoretical confluence between rhetoric and narrative ethnography as a jumping off point and guiding orientation. In so doing, my dissertation draws from and speaks to issues at the heart of qualitative communication research. Stories are the tool—like literature for Laurence Langer (Cohen, 2008)—I use to understand the lives of the survivors I work with, as well as the value and processes of writing about our experiences and human memory and storytelling generally.

Why adopt such an approach? In 2006 Geoffrey Hartman published a defining special edition in the Duke journal Poetics Today. In his introduction, titled “The Humanities of Testimony,” he names the nexus at which my dissertation is aimed. The humanities of testimony is the place where stories (fluid, cyclical, collective symbols—“webs of significance” [Geertz, 1973, p. 5]) meet individual bodies (tellers/listeners), where individuals meet the collective, where rhetoric meets ethnography, where the Holocaust meets witnessing, where popular culture meets the historical record, where ethics and values meet the pragmatics of storytelling, oral history, and remembering.

Hartman’s special issue on the humanities of testimony features interdisciplinary scholarship from around the globe that addresses the multifaceted problems of considering, representing, and making sense of the waves of Holocaust survivor
witnessing that have—somewhat curiously—grown in frequency since the events of the Shoah. In particular, Henry Greenspan (Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006) and Laurence Langer (2006) contribute pieces to the issue, which show the need for “genuine” interviewing (Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006) and the questions inherent to considering testimony that inform my project (Langer, 2006). At the 2010 Lessons and Legacies Conference on the Holocaust, I met Langer, Greenspan, and Hartman. Both Dr. Langer and Dr. Greenspan signed the copies of their books I just so happened to carry with me.

Another brief ethnographic story about my experience at the Lessons and Legacies conference helps to illustrate the significance of my meeting with Langer, Greenspan, and Hartman and how this relates to the project at hand. This helps to show that my work with Holocaust survivors is situated at a unique moment in history where individual, collaborative, and qualitative work with survivors, which examines philosophical, humanistic, and radically empirical (Jackson, 1989; James, 1912/2003) aspects of survivor stories, has potential value for the survivors I work with, for myself, for the field of communication, and for the field of the humanities of Holocaust survivor testimony.

Thursday, November 4, 2010, the first day of the conference. The insider feel surprised me. The few hundred Holocaust scholars in attendance at the conference in Boca Raton, Florida seemed, generally, to know each other. The large hotel dining-hall was populated with famous Holocaust historians. The high-spirits and genuine affect of the President of the Holocaust Education Foundation, Theodore “Zev” Weiss, energized the room. Zev was a teenager when the Holocaust occurred and he survived the Auschwitz II concentration camp. He asked for the graduate students in the room to stand
and be recognized. Out of the hundreds in the audience, only a dozen or so students stood. This was clearly a conference for those established in the field and concerned with how to best remember and pass on the official history of the Holocaust. The “traditional” historical bent of this particular conference took explicit shape when renowned Yale historian Timothy Snyder delivered his Opening Plenary Session titled, “Holocaust History: An Agenda for Renewal.”

In his presentation, Snyder criticized an overemphasis on “the literary shift” in Holocaust historiography, which has grown over the past thirty years. He argued for a renewed commitment to densely documented, as well as minutely historically contextualized, understandings of historical/military/governmental milieus and movements in relation to one another that shaped the Holocaust, such as relations between the Soviet Union, Poland, and Germany, and the interconnectedness of military, economic, and cultural elements of the Holocaust. Based on his most recent book, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Stalin and Hitler* (2010), Snyder emphasized the importance of recognizing the diverse flows of geo-political movements and influence at the time and since.

After his talk, Dr. Ellis and I spoke about Dr. Snyder’s presentation. While Snyder is a widely recognized expert on Holocaust history and made cogent arguments, he had effectively silenced many in the room. He seemed to wish to quell, to a certain extent, those of the so-called wishy-washy, “literary historical” persuasion (Langer’s and Hartman’s camp), as well as those of the psychological persuasion (Greenspan’s camp). In fact, during the discussion portion of Snyder’s presentation, Greenspan felt the need to stand and speak up. He argued that many of us are not historians and that adopting a
plurality of approaches to the study of the Holocaust is not only justified but necessary. Snyder’s position, however, was that there has been too much consideration given to thinking about the problems of history and survivor testimony, as opposed to doing deep, categorical, and documentation/archive-driven History.

Not a bad point by itself. Those with the mind to do so ought to heed Dr. Snyder’s call. But I find myself in a different situation, with different sensibilities. Even Laurence Langer (1996), the foremost expert on Holocaust survivor testimonies (Cohen, 2008), argues that no qualified researcher in the field is suggesting that Holocaust history be based purely on survivor testimony and the issues testimonies suggest, at the expense of Snyder’s sensibility for a renewed agenda of traditional, comparative, and “hard” history. We are simply arguing that survivors’ experiences and stories have a unique, important place in Holocaust history and offer different possibilities and limitations, as far as understanding the past, present, and future of human beings are concerned.

After that opening session, Dr. Ellis and I attended many presentations, always finding ourselves drawn to the “literary-leaning,” testimony-centric panels. We were not alone. Those panels overflowed with conference attendees. So much so in fact that during the “Words of Their Own: Diary Writing During the Holocaust” panel, the conference organizers had to open up a larger room to accommodate the crowd. I was drawn to projects that dealt with humanistic and philosophical issues connected to representing personal experience of Holocaust survivors.

Take for example panel 8: “Raising the ‘Walking Dead,’” for which Laurence Langer was the discussant. This panel explored the issues we confront when making sense of the impossible concept of the “walking dead” or muselmann of the death camps
at Auschwitz. This panel and the work of Lisa Skitolsky (2010) were about the limits of discursive logic. She showed, building from Langer’s work, that a new vocabulary is needed to understand the other-world of the Holocaust universe. She argued that a new vocabulary offers “fresh perceptions” to understanding the Holocaust and survivors’ experience. Her example was the impossible concept of the “unlivable life” of the concentration camp itself: the *muselmann*. Viewing Langer in reaction heartened me that my work might be able to address similarly complicated philosophical questions.

Then came the most powerful panel Dr. Ellis and I viewed at Lessons and Legacies 2010: “Survivors Speak: Examining the Past, Facing the Future.” The title of this panel speaks perfectly to the ethic and central exigency of my work. It focuses on the same issues of memory and storytelling in the process of understanding the past while facing the future. The panel was comprised of Anna Ornstein and Harry Penn, both Harvard psychiatrists, and Robert Waisman of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Center. All three speakers were Jewish Holocaust survivors. All three told stories of their lives during the Holocaust and their lives making sense of their experiences since.

It was Harvard Medical School and Boston Psychoanalytic Institute psychiatrist Harry Penn’s first time telling his story publicly. I watched as a thoughtful psychiatrist and wise man unfolded memory after memory of his life during and since the Holocaust. He unraveled the many denials he had over his life, always rejecting the notion that the Holocaust had been a significant defining factor in his life, personality, relationships, and anxieties. But, time and again, the specter of his experiences during the Holocaust, and his “deep memory” (Langer, 1991, p. 1) of the events since, floated through the cracks and rose to the surface.
On that day, for the first time, Dr. Penn *came to terms* with his experience in public and, as he admitted then, it was life-changing for him, and I’d say for anyone who cared to really listen with his story. Penn called his process of coming to terms with his memory and experience through telling his story his “ascent.” He climbed through the layers of his life and memory, finding new levels of existential freedom at each plateau and each stage of his life and maturation, yet all the time incomplete, facing even deeper memories and fears, facing his experience during the Holocaust at every level. He came to realize that the war touched every aspect of his life and cut to the core of his being. Like the survivors I have spoken with, Penn also revealed that through facing his past in his cyclical, contingent, and ongoing story, he was able to, for the first time, have “the feeling of having a ground” under him and a past with at least some ephemeral fragment of contingent coherence. Penn said that now that he had told his story once, he would tell it again. He attested to the moral and affective value of sharing his story for himself as well as for communicating it with others.

Dr. Penn’s story of remembering, of the “strange” (Friedlander, 1979, p. 72) and ever-evolving/dissolving reconstructions of memory—to borrow Holocaust historian and child survivor Saul Friedlander’s construct of memory—is similar to those I hear from the survivors I talk with. Being in conversation with survivors as they come to terms with their remembered pasts, as they tell their stories and relate their histories, is a special case worthy of sustained attention.

The stories told in this dissertation, *our stories*, are individual in the sense that they are unique, specific, and contextual. Our stories are at the same time collective (Bartesaghi & Bowen-Perlmutter, 2009), in the sense that they are socially constructed
and contextual (situated in cultural/historical/relational symbolic matrices). Memory and our stories are rich with conscious and unconscious reference points (like a tangential reference to *The Beatles* in a dissertation on Holocaust survivor stories), cultural and historical resonances that motivate and facilitate our symbolic actions in the present and guide us toward the (hope of a more livable) future.

Once again, we are back to the idea of motives (morals/values) (Burke, 1950). I am faced with the telos or teleology of the tale—the purpose or goal of the story. As MacIntyre (1981) points out, “the” morals of any story are dangerous and have deteriorated in the violent, post-Enlightenment, post-Holocaust, post-modern world in which we live. To deal with these risks, following what I read as MacIntyre’s (1981) warning and conclusion to *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, the goal here is to collaborate in telling survivors’ stories in ways that the survivors with whom I work (and the community in which I write) find valuable. I do so in order to examine from where we come, to embrace the present moment and relationships formed, and to imagine a more livable future together as human beings. I want to know the possible value of telling this/these story/(his/her)stories. I believe, charting the current trends in Holocaust historiography and the humanities of testimony, that this story has the potential to speak in multiple registers and voices to an interdisciplinary community.

To realize these goals, chapter two begins with a review of the *humanities of testimony* (Hartman, 2006). I surf the changing currents of historical and popular cultural trends that have created various waves of “witnessing” the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors over the past forty years in the United States. These waves have created the momentum and space for a project like mine to exist. In chapter three I explore the theory
and methods that influenced the praxis of the chapters that follow. In particular, I highlight a storytelling-theory ethic, which errs on the side of relating and listening deeply to the uniqueness and importance of individual stories. This leads me to discuss the compassionate ethnographic methods of this work and the pragmatics of how I interacted with and represented the stories of the three Holocaust survivors with whom I interacted and collaborated.

The heart of my work are the three content chapters, each a unique, compassionate ethnographic story of my ongoing conversations with Salomon and Sandy Wainberg (chapter four), Manuel Goldberg and Rachel Rivlin (chapter five), and Sonia Wasserberger (chapter six). Each chapter highlights key dialogic moments between the survivors and me, and I represent their voices and our dialogues at length. Each chapter exemplifies the central theme and tone of my work with each survivor. In chapter four I focus on the power of compassionate listening that emerged between Sal, Sandy, and me, highlighting Sal’s history, insights from our time together, and our quest to “really listen” to each other. This chapter culminates in the ethnographic telling of Sal’s and my final interaction together and the lessons I take from listening to Sal at the end of his life. Chapter four is about showing more than telling what Sal and I mean by “sharing ‘a big kettle of soup.’”

In chapter five I delve into the classic and contemporary paradox of seeking compassion while feeling justifiable, murderous rage toward the Nazis that emerged as the main theme in my conversations with Manuel Goldberg and Rachel Rivlin. I use Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification to grapple with the tension between identification and division, compassion and rage. This chapter shows the playful, familial
identification that formed between Manuel, Rachel, and me while telling the dialogic story of Manuel’s history as a child survivor at the historical and symbolic edges of the Holocaust. It concludes by exploring ethnographic possibilities for acting together and handling productively the inherent and complex antitheses of life and death, compassion and rage, identification and division in which we live and from which our stories emerge (Greenspan, 2010).

In chapter six I narrate the affinity that emerged between Sonia Wasserberger and me through our acts of listening and telling together. I focus on our relationship, which crosses traditional boundaries of researcher/subject, age, gender, and bloodlines. While my relationship with Sonia is different from the relationships I formed with Sal and Manuel, it demonstrates an ethic of meeting people where they are and trying to do research in ways that are mutually beneficial. Toward that end, I give a detailed, historical account if Sonia’s family history as she knows it and do my best to honor and tell her story as meaningfully as I can. Her history is interwoven with our relational conversations, adding multiple voices and an interpersonal tone to what we have to say. I use Donna Haraway’s (2004) motive to live and write figures that help us to expand affinity across margins in order to share the “Sonia and Sala”—peace and wisdom—of compassionate storytelling and my time spent with Mrs. Wasserberger.

Chapter seven considers the insights that have emerged through this process, focusing on the personal, theoretical, methodological, ethical, and historical implications of these stories and of the motive to cultivate a compassionate, ethnographic approach to oral history interviewing at the end of an era. I reflect back on the initial questions that drew me to this project—the why and how of storytelling. I begin to synthesize the
lessons learned from this project by speaking back to extant literature on research with Holocaust survivors that attempts to go beyond the traditional frames of “trauma,” “testimony,” and objective history. The final chapter extends the theoretical and methodological contributions of compassionate ethnographic storytelling, relating the compassion, identification, and affinity of this project to contemporary, qualitative research in communication and oral history. I end with the limits of this project and my personal limits as a (non)Jewish storyteller and call for a storytelling manifesto. This project seeks to relate to readers and open us all up—me and the survivors I work with included—to engage wholeheartedly and passionately in always-ongoing quests to remember, relate, and share our stories and histories, even in the face of suffering and forgetting, even in the face of the vast unknowability of individual memories of surviving the Holocaust.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature:
Situating Holocaust Survivor Stories

Speaking with the Humanities of Testimony

The themes explored in this chapter, which I draw from the vast research on Holocaust survivor stories, contextualizes my project in ever more localized and specific ways: from the problem of searching for meaning in Holocaust survivor experience, to the concept of post-modern/post-Holocaust history, to important overlaps between pop-culture witnessing and the popularity of oral history, to the philosophical undertones of famous Holocaust memoirs.

Confronting the Void: (Un)Meaning in the Post-Holocaust World

The Enlightenment belief in human beings as reasonable creatures, pursuing their own good and the good of the community, must now share its influence with a darker and more demeaning heritage. . . . We are still wrestling with the loss of stature that a disaster like the Holocaust imposes on our ideal civilization.

(Langer, 1995, p. 5)

What does meaning look like in the post-Holocaust world? In his decades of writing about individual Holocaust survivor testimonies, Langer advises us to observe the darkness and that which is unknowable about the Holocaust (Langer, 1975, 1991, 1995).

“The history of the Holocaust itself leads to a spiritual universe more haggard than the
one inhabited before its arrival” (Langer, 1995, p. 5). He reminds us of the horizons of fragmented meaning and the voids beyond, created in the wake of the Holocaust and survivor testimony. Yet even Langer’s anti-redemptive heroin, Holocaust survivor and writer Charlotte Delbo, asks us to make—to misappropriate one of Langer’s (1982) own phrases—a *choiceless choice*. Delbo asks us to do the impossible: “Try to look. Just try to see” (Delbo, 1997, p. 84).

I deeply respect and am inspired by Langer’s and other scholars’ (Young, 2000) anti-meaning/anti-redemptive position, the position that there is no reclamation of the loss, there is no rehabilitating humanity to a state where we have transcended the evil we have committed, are committing, and are still capable of. The anti-redemptive/anti-meaning position shows that time does not heal wounds of this horrific nature and that the human capacity for inhumanity surpasses our ability to know, comprehend, come to terms with, or make sense of atrocities of this magnitude. Many artists whom I respect hold similar positions in the post-Holocaust universe (Rosenbaum, 2006; Spiegelman, 1986, 1992) and create work and art through (and despite) their limitations to represent. Those who subscribe to this aesthetic are not trying to *transcend trauma* but instead struggle to become aware, through our stories and creative efforts, of as much of what we can while knowing that more is always lost than found. I am inspired by this choiceless choice, this anti-redemptive aesthetic, this motive to know in the face of unknowability.

The survivors I work with happen to share parallel opinions. They are explicitly against *cleaning up* the record and providing *Hollywood endings*. Much is (and must be) left unknown, unknowable, and tragic about the Holocaust. Much is unknowable about personal experience and memory more generally. And all quests for meaning are
inherently contingent, limited, and ongoing. Pragmatically speaking, however, we do just as Delbo pleads—we try to look, we try to see. We listen and tell, read and write, appreciate and create. In Young’s (1988) words, we write and rewrite and must accept the consequences that may come. Here I am reminded again of Sal Wainberg’s ethic, which I discuss in detail in chapter four. I asked Sal, “What if I don’t do a good job telling your story?”

Sal replied without hesitation, “You do your best. Do your worst. If it’s good or bad, at least you did it, and it will start a conversation. It will cause people to talk about it.” We confront the void of meaning—even while acknowledging its grave existence and ghostly contours. I respect the void and fear the horrors of individual and collective history and approach the (quest)ion of meaning—fragmented, contingent, relational, and open—through storytelling with individual Holocaust survivors.

The Concept of Post-modern/Post-Holocaust History

Many comprehensive histories of the Holocaust exist (Bauer, 1982, 2002; Brenbaum, 1993; Hilberg, 1961; Friedlander, 2007; Snyder, 2010). Rather than focusing on personal experience and the ethics and praxis of historiography, they document, as fully and accurately as possible, all that “happened” in the build-up to and during the systematic extermination of approximately six million European Jews (Bauer, 1982). As Bauer (1982) makes clear, it is important to remember that the Nazis and their collaborators murdered two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population, in addition to somewhere between five and eleven million others (ethnic Poles and Serbs, Romani people, persons with disabilities, homosexuals, and political leftists). Scholars argue that the Holocaust is the most textually documented event in Western history (Hartman, 2006;
Wieviorka, 2006). My work builds on new trajectories in post-modern and narrative history, oral history, survivor recounting, and literary historiography of the Holocaust. This project is less concerned with documenting what happened during the Holocaust than in exploring more deeply the phenomenological intricacies of those who live with the memory of the Shoah (Hartman, 2006; Kushner, 2006) and survivors’ individual and relational processes of coming to terms with their experiences today. Additionally, I am concerned with the problematics that emerge in the process of collaborating with survivors in telling their experiences.

Kushner (2006) argues that individual testimonies from Holocaust survivors ought to be examined more deeply and not used as mere sound bites. Helping to explain the relevance of qualitative, interdisciplinary approaches to survivor testimony, Kushner (2006) goes on to explain:

In terms of general intellectual currents, it has taken the ‘history from below’ movement, alongside the more recent return to favor of qualitative, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of society, partly prompted by the pluralistic impulses of post-modernism, to enable fresh responses to Holocaust testimony. (p. 278)

While this idea is growing in popularity, academics have been slow to realize the importance of individual survivor experiences and post-modern, qualitative approaches to the study of these experiences. In fact, Kushner (2006) asserts that “only Henry Greenspan, who interviewed survivors over the past decade in a much more informal way than the Yale project, has done full justice to the process by which an individual’s story is made” (p. 286). I situate my project in the worlds that Kushner (2006) speaks of, and also
look to Greenspan (2010) as a guide to working in dynamic, informal, and repeated ways with survivors.

The Holocaust as an event challenged and unsettled modernist, traditional, linear, objectivist, document-oriented, and totalizing/fully-understandable notions of history. As human beings still living with modernist notions of progress and working toward an ideal human civilization, the attempt at the systematic, government/socially-sanctioned genocidal murder of Jews shattered what we thought we knew about the liberating ascent of human culture. Those who were murdered and the stories and experiences of survivors trouble history at multiple levels. Many elements of survivors’ experiences were too horrific for them to speak or even comprehend. Complicating this picture were the unprecedented political and cultural structures and movements that created a context for the state supported systematic extermination of millions of human beings (Bloxham & Kushner, 2005; Langer, 1991, 2006; Young, 1993). Langer (2006) describes the unknowability and unrepresentability of the Holocaust powerfully when he writes: “Neither Sophocles nor Shakespeare had ever heard of the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz, where men and women were suffocated and burned in a universe of mass murder devoid of individual choice” (p. 304). The Holocaust turned to ash the rationales, edifices, idea(l)s, and facades of modernism.

In *The Holocaust and the Post-modern* literary philosopher Robert Eaglestone (2008) argues that post-modernism is a theoretical/cultural response to the Holocaust as an historical event. Eaglestone shows that the discipline of history, faced with the impossibility of grappling with the unknowabilities of the Holocaust and survivor experiences, was shattered, and that post-Holocaust historiography informed and is
informed by post-modern, interdisciplinary, and ethical questions that cut across theory, practice, testimony, literature, history, and philosophy. As a discipline, communication has benefited from various post-modern waves of theory and research. Post-modernism has helped to justify myriad new trajectories of interdisciplinary, qualitative, mixed-methods, autoethnographic, narrative, self-reflexive, and critical rhetorical perspectives that influence my project. I argue that communication, and particularly my compassionate ethnographic approach, are well situated in the post-modern ferment to deal with the multifaceted—methodological, theoretical, and philosophical—issues that are inherent to understanding, engaging with, and representing the Holocaust and survivors’ experiences today.

To further articulate the post-modern historical terrain my project builds from, Dominic LaCapra’s (1983; 1999; 2004; 2009) metahistorical work articulates limits of history and memory in light of critical theory in the wake of the Holocaust. Related to the risks and rewards of my project, LaCapra (1998) warns, “one particularly dubious phenomenon is the nostalgic, sentimental turn to a partly fictionalized past that is conveyed in congenially ingratiating, safely conventionalized narrative form” (p. 8). Yet, narrative memory work about the Holocaust, he goes on to argue, has value “when a concern with memory includes a desire to be attentive to the problem of history insofar as it bears on the present and future” (LaCapra, 1998, p. 8). By adopting a reflexive exploration of one’s own implicitness in the act of remembering and storytelling in the present, in the ongoing political and limited process of history itself, LaCapra (1998; 2004; 2009) shows how we can understand and work through what he calls “traumatic” pasts, which remain in the present and shape the future. This is not merely storytelling for
nostalgic, sentimental motives with convenient forms. My project attempts to demonstrate the value of reflexive, situated, and relational storytelling with survivors today as we look to the future.

Zwick (1995) and others use the term “new historiography” to refer to projects at the liminal edges of traditional Holocaust history and historiography (see, for example, Bloxham & Kushner, 2005). My project fits into this category and thus needs to be contextualized within the historical and cultural contexts in which it makes sense. This is one way to acknowledge that the past is always present and that the present context influences what can be remembered of the past (Friedlander, 1979; Young, 2000). Oral history, for example, is tied directly to the need to understand the Holocaust in ways that go beyond textual documentation, as well as to the cultural appetites for survivors’ stories (Langer, 2006). As Langer (2006) argues, the search for words to convey the “deathlife” (p. 297) that was the Holocaust is in testimony, memoir, and fiction, and the struggle is to find a language that is appropriate to something that is alien to most. Culturally, however, over the past four decades, trials, television media, film, memoir, and historical archives have attempted to make the “alien” world of the Holocaust familiar.

Important Overlaps between Pop-Culture and the Popularity of Oral History

I am led to the multiple overlaps between popular cultural representations of the Holocaust and survivor testimony and the popularity of oral history as a blossoming method of social scientific research (Janesick, 2007, 2010). As part of the latest wave of witnessing, (beyond) testimony (High, forthcoming), and oral history, my project carries traces of the waves that came before. By navigating the shifting terrains of witnessing
and testimony, my goal is to contextualize and justify historically the collaborative, qualitative, and ethnographic oral history storytelling approach I employ.

The oral history movement to study the Holocaust gained favor in the United States during radical social and political changes of the 1960s (Assmann, 2006; Hartman, 2006) and began to gain in popularity after the Eichmann trial, which focused on detailing the human atrocity of the Holocaust as opposed to only considering political wrongdoings (Arendt, 1963; Wieviorka, 2006). After the 1945-46 Nuremberg Trial of Nazis war criminals immediately following the events of the Holocaust, the world was left without a public understanding of the human meaning and ramifications of the atrocities. The Nuremberg Trials were a series of military tribunals focused on the political and legal wrongdoings of captured Nazis. Responding to the cultural need, the Eichmann trial had a different goal and tone. Hannah Arendt (1963) argues in Eichmann in Jerusalem (based on her journalistic work on the trial for The New Yorker) that the trial ought to have been about the legal act of arbitrating “justice.” Yet, she admits that the trial, designed as a media event by the first Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, was more about the politics and ethics of hearing survivors’ emotional testimony about the Holocaust, which helped to solidify Israel as a state in the wake of the Holocaust, and began a collective grieving and guilt processes, in particular for the Jewish people.

At the time, from a traditional historical point of view, oral history was suspect, as memory and personal experience are always questionable in terms of “truth” and “accuracy” (Assmann, 2006; Douglass & Vogler, 2003). This created a divide between personal memory and the historical record. However, oral history and qualitative analysis of Holocaust testimony taps into important human elements that transcended
limits of historical “truth” by exposing what Kraft (2006) calls “the phenomenology of the tormented” (p. 311). As Assmann (2006) explains, personal testimony “is less to tell what happened than what it felt like to be in the center of those events; they provide a personal view from within” (p. 263). In Assmann’s (2006) review of the trajectories of history and memory since the Holocaust, she notes a trend away from a “traditional historiographic” perspective where memory was suspect information, to the oral history view popularized in the 1960s and 70s. Assmann (2006) explains that popular media and a “memory culture,” which encouraged historians to look more closely at the Holocaust beginning in the 1970s, influenced this shift. A shift away from traditional history to a focus on individual testimony, Assmann (2006) argues, “concern[s] less the events themselves than the experience and aftermath of the events in the lives of those who experienced them and those who decide to remember them, together with the problem of how to represent them” (p. 263). My work resonates with these goals and is interested less in “what happened” than in the phenomenological complexities of those who live with memories of their experience during the Holocaust. The potential of such a radical historical perspective on oral testimony of holocaust survivors, according to Assmann (2006), “shatter[s] the biographical frame” (p. 264) and “dismal monotony” (p. 265) of Holocaust historiography.

Following Hartman’s (2006) humanities of Holocaust testimony, I too find it useful to show the correlation between popular cultural representations of the Holocaust and the acceptance of oral history in the academy. This exploration shows that the desires and abilities of the public and academics to hear the intimate stories of Holocaust survivors, especially in the U.S., are tied to cultural trends and what is “fashionable,” to
use Sandy Wainberg’s term (Assmann, 2006; Kushner, 2006; Wieviorka, 2006). My work is not innocent and also carries conscious and unconscious cultural characteristics of each of this “fashionable” subject. This story of witnessing begins in the U.S. with NBC’s four-part miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978 (Wieviorka, 2006). The miniseries catalyzed the aspiration of the public to hear survivors’ stories. Wieviorka (2006) points out that the popularity of the NBC miniseries spawned Yale’s Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony. Dori Laub (1992) and Laurence Langer (1993) conceived of the archive, trained the interviewers, and did many of the interviews themselves.

The 4,400 Fortunoff Archive interviews highlight the psychological aspects of survivors’ testimonies. Particularly, Laub’s (1992) perspective as a psychologist influenced his view on the necessity of trained secondary-witnesses, those who witness the Holocaust survivors’ witnessing. Laub and Langer emphasize the importance of skilled interviewers, both knowledgeable about the history of the Holocaust and the nuances of in-depth psychological interviewing. Talking with Dr. Langer at the Lessons and Legacies conference, I again saw his sensibility for informed interviewers. When Dr. Ellis and I told him about our project, the first thing he asked was, “Have you read the literature and viewed the archived testimonies?”

I responded, “Yes, I’ve been reading and watching as much as I can for the past few years, looking at the Shoah [archive] interviews and the Fortunoff interviews.” Geoffrey Hartman was standing next to Langer, and I added, “Dr. Hartman’s 2006 special issue in *Poetics Today* has been very helpful.” Both Langer and Hartman seemed pleased and surprised.

Hartman asked, “You’ve read that!?”
I said, “Oh, yes—it’s exactly what I’m interested in.” While Langer didn’t come out and say it, I got the sense that he is wary of uninformed individuals meddling in the lives of survivors without knowing where they are stepping or how to proceed ethically and meaningfully. I tend to agree.

Next came the groundbreaking work of Claude Lanzmann (1985). In his nine-hour documentary (for lack of a better description) *Shoah*, Lanzmann aggressively interviewed perpetrators, bystanders, and survivors at key sites across Europe (Kushner, 2006). The film is quiet with a tense, austere beauty, all the more disturbing considering its intimate and horrifying subject matter. The project took Lanzmann eleven years to make, six years devoted to interviewing alone (Felman, 1994). The documentary received critical acclaim for its directness and simplicity, as well as its shirking of traditional documentary aesthetics in place of hearing the voices of people who directly experienced the Holocaust. Instead of the standard documentary narration, full soundtrack, and explanations of what was going on, Lanzmann left us with him, those he interviewed, and the mostly-rural and pastoral backdrop of post-Holocaust Europe.

While some are critical of Lanzmann’s confrontational interviewing techniques and the possibility or re-traumatizing the survivors he interviewed (and I find myself in this camp), many consider his film to be the best record of direct, eyewitness experience of the Holocaust (Felman, 1994). While I personally stay away from his style as an interviewer, I will admit that Lanzmann’s film demonstrates the raw power of representing first-hand experiences of the *Shoah*, as well as the ethical, theoretical, and methodological issues we face when we approach first-hand Holocaust witnessing. And I will also admit that I am glad Lanzmann went about his project following his own ethic,
even if it happens to differ from the ethic that guides my work. His style as an interviewer provoked certain kinds of responses, responses that would have come out differently with a different interviewer. I believe the same can be said about any interview project and this project in particular: the motives guiding the interview and the style of the interviewer have a shaping hand in what gets told and recorded and how.

A third and quite possibly the most significant overlap between popular cultural representations of the Holocaust and oral history occurred with Steven Spielberg’s (1993) film *Schindler’s List*. The popularity of the film helped Spielberg found USC’s Shoah Foundation Institute, which today is the largest archive of survivor testimonies and houses over 52,000 oral histories of Holocaust survivors. This project shifted “the collection of testimonies to a new scale” (Wieviorka, 2006). Shoah interviews tend to be one-time, life review interviews that last, on average, approximately two hours. Interviewers remain off camera and are largely un-emotive and journalistic in tone. The goal of this project is to capture as many survivor testimonies as possible in as “clean” a way as possible, and to organize and archive these interviews in innovative ways, so as to allow easy access to them for future generations. Some are critical of Spielberg and the archive, due to its Hollywood ties (Loshitzky, 1997). Yet, the fact remains that without Spielberg’s popularity and financial power, the world’s largest and most comprehensive archive of survivors’ testimonies would not exist. The Shoah Archive makes possible history projects that use “snippets” of survivors’ stories as the central tool for understanding and learning history (see Greene & Kumar, 2000; Smith, 2005).
The Philosophical Undertones of Famous Holocaust Memoirs

I would now like to move to a more intimate, specific level. The third theme I review on the subject of the humanities of testimony is the philosophical undertones of survivor memories. Hundreds of famous survivor memories have been created; therefore, I sample only a few here. My goal is to show how individual, autobiographical accounts connect with and are influenced by collective, historical exigencies. Most specifically, I am interested in memoirs that confront the treacherous quest for meaning individually and collectively in the post-Holocaust world. This mini-analysis conveys and resonates with the kinds of themes I explore in my interviews with Holocaust survivors. I also use the issues these memories highlight to help think through and craft appropriate questions about the quest for meaning in digging through one’s memory of suffering.

Many famous memories have become, more or less, canonized representations of survivors’ experiences during the Holocaust (for example, Frank, 1952/3002; Frankl, 1958; Friedlander, 1979; Levi, 1959; Wiesel, 1982). These popular stories, many of which are taught in grade school in the United States, show survivors who have become successful and popular writers of their experiences. According to Langer (2006), successful memoirists and writers of the Holocaust, “strip a rhetoric of meaning from the chaos and mass murder” (p. 297). Holocaust memories show, no matter how fragmented or tragic, that some survivors are compelled to confront the void of meaning. In response, memoirs and memoirists compel us, the readers, to confront the impossible as well: “Try to look. Just try to see” (Delbo, 1997, p. 84).

Primo Levi’s (1958) Survival in Auschwitz (originally titled If This is a Man) shows, with the detail and categorical abilities of Levi’s background as a chemist
combined with his moral, philosophical, and critical questioning of humanity in the face of inhumanity, the contradictions of experiencing and writing the unknowable. Due to Victor Frankl’s (1958) career as a psychoanalyst with an existential orientation, *Man’s Search For Meaning* shows more explicitly the quest for existential freedom, which Frankl’s experience shows can be achieved even in the unimaginable horror and chaos of the concentration camp. Charlotte Delbo’s (1997) *Auschwitz and After*, more poetically and darkly, details the contradictions of life and death, beauty and horror, intimacy and distance, freedom and guilt she felt throughout her. She vividly explores the paradoxical urge she felt to write her experience while she simultaneously felt crushed by the impossibility of writing about her experience surviving Auschwitz (Langer, 2006).

Excluding *The Diary of a Young Girl* (2003) (originally translated and published in 1952 as *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*), Eli Wiesel’s (1982) *Night* has become the book that young Americans first read and associate with the Holocaust. *Night* describes, in intense detail, the trials of daily life and death during Wiesel’s time in the Holocaust. Memoirs of survivors of the Shoah are both essential to history and part of the popular consciousness that shapes the cultural appetite for more and different stories from survivors. Not all survivors, however, have the time, means, or inclination to write their experiences. And we are now at a different moment in time where the youngest remaining survivors were only children during the Holocaust. Our current situation creates different stories as well as difficulties to address.

Saul Friedlander’s (1979) autobiographical history *When Memory Comes* spoke to me when I read it as a fitting comparison to the lives and storytelling processes of the survivors with whom I have worked. Friedlander’s historically, politically,
philosophically, and personally complex text deserves more extended academic attention than I can give it here. Synthesizing his work, his story offers a particularly compelling path through the tangles of memory and is directly related to the challenges survivors face today. *When Memory Comes* is a tale of a wise man searching his childhood memory in order to make sense of his life and life in general. His process resonates with those I have spoken with and Harvard psychiatrist Harry Penn’s struggle to tell his story. It is an important blueprint for the issues that we face as humans remembering traumatic and not traumatic childhoods from the distance provided by decades of life, reflection, and hindsight (Freeman, 2010).

After writing noted and traditional histories of the Holocaust, Friedlander (1979) decided to write about his childhood where he “lived on the edges of the catastrophe” (p. 155), as a survivor whose parents were killed in Auschwitz. He was hidden in numerous Catholic schools at the time and had a tragic childhood full of being an outsider, being bullied, and feeling guilty for his parents’ absence. In *When Memory Comes* (1979), Friedlander struggles through the difficult process of unfolding and articulating the cyclical, often “strange” (p. 72) layers of his memory in order to figure out his past and who he is today. While doing this, Saul juxtaposes his specific, often tragic life with collective human experience in order to show that our histories are always impossible to fully render, fully remember, and fully know. Yet, through the process of memory, through the work of imagination, through the collective symbolic stew that we, as human beings, are always already a part of, meaning (flexible, open, and contingent) is forged in the face of contradiction and chaos.
Like Saul Friedlander, Sal Wainberg, Manuel Goldberg, and Sonia Wasserberger struggle with their interpretations of their memories. The storytelling of those I have spoken with is parallel to Friedlander’s in its searching, open-ended quality and digging processes. Sal Wainberg, for example, spoke to me about his fear of not being able to “remember it all” before he died. In that sense, then, Sal’s story shares the same struggle of all history and storytelling: the quest to remember and be remembered in a world where time conquers all. Sal’s stories are just as contingent as Friedlander’s (1979) or any of ours. Saul Friedlander (1979) was after the same elusive, experiential memories when he decided to struggle through writing his only autobiographical history of the Holocaust decades after his experience. As Sal Wainberg became a storyteller, like Friedlander, he began to dig deeper and was able to find a sense of peace with parts of his experience/memory. But memory is a difficult, ongoing, open process. Friedlander’s own story reminds me of Sal’s, as well as the classic human story we all face: How do we make sense of life that entails suffering in a world where everything is ephemeral (Chodron, 2001, 2012)?

But all hope is not lost. As Friedlander (1979) shows in his writing and experience, some of our ghosts can be exhumed, exposed, and aired through memory and storytelling. Some of the complications and horrors of the past can be explored in the present. Some of the experiences that we carry from childhood can be known, and we can make sense of (come to terms with) parts of our individual and collective memories in ways that show us why it is, today, that we see, feel, think, experience, love and hate the ways we do. In many senses, Saul’s story and the collective Jewish story are symbolic of the great human quest for meaning—Frankl’s (1985/1846) “will to meaning” (p. 121)—
in the face of suffering and chaos. In Friedlander’s (1979) words, “I tell myself that the Jewish state may perhaps be only a step on the way of a people whose particular destiny has come to symbolize the endless *quest* (emphasis mine)—ever hesitant, ever begun anew—of all mankind” (p. 183). In Frankl’s (1985/1946) words: “We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed” (p. 135).

Memory is a quest, and no quest is easy: “the unbearable is effaced or, rather, sinks below the surface, while the banal comes to the fore” (Friedlander, 1979, p. 79). Often times, when we find stories that we cannot handle or are too offensive to speak of, we avoid them with denial or defense mechanisms (as Manuel Goldberg told me) and allow them to lie dormant. Sometimes, though, we gather the courage to break down our defense mechanisms and share parts of these effaced stories, embracing and exposing these shadows, as Jungians might say (Poulos, 2006; Patti, 2012a). While Friedlander makes it through his storytelling, his identity and history are by no means fulfilled, whole, fully synthesized, or made completely coherent, but the quest itself provides its own justification: “As a matter of fact, *this quest* (emphasis mine), this incessant confrontation with the past . . . has become sufficient reason in itself, and a necessary undertaking. . . . when memory comes, knowledge comes too, little by little” (p. 182). And perhaps, when memory comes, so too do wisdom and insight.

This is the hope, despite the fact that there is no final synthesis, no ultimate conclusion, not for Saul and not for any of us: “These pages are ending while everything is still uncertain” (p. 182). Friedlander’s story is both classic and uniquely his own. And he tells it poetically, imaginatively, and with simple power—like the stories he himself
was drawn to in the Bible: “the simplest passages we read were perhaps those that bore the most powerful message, that were infused with the most intense poetry” (p. 12). His work provides a guiding light into the process of excavating the dark, winding root systems of our memories of the past in the present, especially childhood memories at the edges of the Holocaust universe, like those my project explores. I too aim to write the stories told as simply and honestly as I can and as they occurred dialogically between me and those with whom I spoke.
Chapter Three:  
New Modes of Working with Holocaust Survivors  

New Modes of Considering Holocaust Survivor Testimony  

Over the past two decades, scholars have begun to unpack the experiential and historical complexities and value of the oral histories of Holocaust survivors. Like my work, Kirby (2008) centralizes phenomenological thinking as helpful to considering “the problems of oral history” (p. 22). Our usage of the term differ slightly however, even though we follow similar philosophical traditions. He uses the formal philosophical concept of phenomenology as a lens to help historians approach oral history more sure-footedly, taking into consideration (among other things) the interviewer’s consciousness, the particular moment in time a representation is made, and the need to “bracket out” and suspend judgment as well as be open to new experiences. I shift the phenomenological lens to focus on the relationships, interactions, and world-views of not only myself, as the interviewer, but also to try and understand, in line with Kraft (2006), survivors’ phenomenological processes of meaning-making. Kirby (2008) argues, much like Kraft (2006), that the phenomenological aspects of oral history are often overlooked yet important attributes of interviews, which help to connect individual experiences with larger philosophical questions.  

Taking the thought one step further, the individual phenomenology of survivors’ stories and the process of listening to individual stories does not stay at the individual
level. In the *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Witzum & Malkinson (2009) examine how survivors’ mourning happens at both individual and collective levels simultaneously. The authors review the literature on the problems of Holocaust history, the lingering “shadow” (p. 130) of the Holocaust in individual and collective memory, the psychological processes of bereavement and coping with trauma, and the reflections of traumatic bereavement in Israeli art and literature through an examination of the work of Samuel Bak and Aaron Appelfeld. The authors’ review of the individual and collective aspects of these artists’ work is similar to, though more detailed than, my review above of the individual and collective resonance of Holocaust memoirs. The authors come to the conclusion that issues of loss, trauma, and bereavement have been culturally absent in how we understand the Holocaust (Witzum & Malkinson, 2009). Witzum & Malkinson suggest, through exploring individual survivors’ creative expressions “from a time-distancing perspective” (p. 141), that we can gain individual and collective knowledge about the *process of coming to terms with suffering*. The authors also suggest that collective registers exist in any individual act of creative expression. Said differently, Witzum & Malkinson (2009) bolster my argument by showing that all symbolic expression is contextual and embedded within broad collective webs of significance.

Understanding individual stories as situated and meaningful at collective levels is one of the cutting edges of human social research on the Holocaust. As further examples, Stein (2009) explores the silence of survivors in the decades following the war, explaining with Goffman’s analysis of stigma the cultural factors that influence what can be expressed and understood. Similarly, Schiff, Noy, & Choler (2001) explore how literary and cultural conventions shape the context of *testimony* itself. These authors
show that there is a dance between intimacy and abstraction, between the individual and the collective, which happens in testimony—both for the teller and the listener—making the present contexts in which stories are told central.

Rosenthal (2006) focuses on survivors’ histories as well as their present reconstructions of their experiences of the past, showing that the presentation of the past is constituted in the present act of narration. She ultimately takes a dialectical, phenomenological perspective on the interrelation between the past and present that is useful for this project to consider. Rosenthal (2006) accomplishes her exploration of the process of biographical research and memory by analyzing the empirical case of “Sergey,” an ethnic German from the former Soviet Union, who was interviewed in order to understand his life history. Through her analysis, among many other more nuanced offerings, Rosenthal (2006) concludes that:

Narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experience. Just as the past is constituted out of the present and the anticipated future, so the present arises out of the past and the future. In this way biographical narratives provide information on the narrator’s present as well as about his/her past and perspectives for the future. (p. 14)

By highlighting the synchronic, simultaneous, and dialectical nature of storytelling, I find Rosenthal’s (2006) conceptualization of the temporal complexities of interviewing and biography helpful in considering how the past, present, and future are connected and functioning in my interviews and stories with Holocaust survivors.

Extending from my attempt to understand the phenomenological and temporal complexities of storytelling and interviewing with Holocaust survivors, my project adopts
an existential orientation. In justifying such an approach, much like my project, Teria Shantall (1999) explores the question of whether life can be experienced as meaningful in the face of suffering by looking to a small group of Holocaust survivors for their perspectives and experiences. Shantall (1999) is herself an existential psychologist who studied under Victor Frankl and practices in his lineage of “logotherapy.” For her project, Shantall attended meetings at a Holocaust survivor organization in Johannesburg for two years as a participant observer. She then selected to interview five survivors and compared the survivors’ stories with Victor Frankl’s (1985/1946) *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Shantall (1999) found that there is a resilience of spirit among some survivors that enables them to rebuild meaningful lives out of the ashes of an oppressive past. According to the survivors she personally spoke with and the archival research she accomplished, Shantall (1999) determined that meaning can be found in suffering if it is seen as a challenge to overcome “evil” with “good” in the practice of those values that make life worthwhile. While I agree with her conclusions and am inspired by her methods and the questions she asks, my dissertation aims to give more satisfying, deeper, intimate, collaborative, and dialogic treatment to individual survivors’ processes of coming to terms with their experience and to the philosophical questions that emerge from this motive and these acts of storytelling. I also wish to trouble the idea of “good” and “evil” as discrete, knowable categories and concepts.

**Collaborative Witnessing with Holocaust Survivors**

Within the field of Holocaust studies is the smaller community of those engaged in collaborative witnessing projects with survivors. Much of this work has only been done in the past decade (Ellis & Rawicki, 2012, forthcoming; Greenspan, 2006, 2010,
forthcoming; High, 2009, forthcoming; Patti, 2012, forthcoming; Rawicki & Ellis, 2011; Rubin & Greenspan, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University). After years of researching this collaborative wave and presenting research on storytelling with Salomon Wainberg at the 2012 “Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence” conference, held at Concordia University in Montreal Canada and sponsored by the Montreal Life Stories project, I knew I had found my home. Presenting at this conference, I gained the experiential knowledge of how my work fit in and added to this burgeoning area of research.

At the “Beyond Testimony and Trauma” conference my ideas about working collaboratively with Holocaust survivors were sharpened. I witnessed two different types of collaborative research: what I termed “macro” and “micro” collaborative projects. The work of historian Steven High and the Montreal Life Stories project is what I consider a “macro” collaborative project, in the sense that the project involved hundreds of interviews, interviewers, and interviewees across many different local refugee groups in Montreal (Cambodian, Rwandan, Haitian, refugee youth, Holocaust survivors, etc.). This “macro” collaborative project also connected scholarly and university communities with local, community-based research. The Montreal Life Stories project’s motive was to collaborate with each local group to best hear and represent their stories in ways that were called for and organized by the groups themselves. This included public and urban art projects, memory and history installations, documentaries, web-based media, educational outreach and performances, and oral history interviews.

More information on this project can be found here: http://lifestoriesmontreal.ca/
I realized then that my project, along with the approaches of Henry Greenspan and Carolyn Ellis, was of a more “micro” collaborative nature. I was inspired by the work Steven High was able to facilitate and organize and the complex, powerful project that resulted. Coming from a background of personal storytelling, a large, community-based project was not where my heart or experience resided, and I knew a project like this was not feasible as a doctoral dissertation. I was instead drawn to “micro,” relational collaboration with only a few individuals. I was drawn to collaborations that “mattered” specifically to those I worked with and me. I wanted to collaborate in ways that dove as deeply as we could into the particularities of the experiences of those with whom I worked, in order to see what we could get into and cultivate together. This, I believe, is the motive behind Henry Greenspan’s (2010, forthcoming) work, and Carolyn Ellis and Jerry Rawicki’s (2012, forthcoming) work as well.

Henry Greenspan’s (2010) forty years of experience working in ongoing, relational ways with a few Holocaust survivors provides a template of the commitment necessary to really listen. Rubin & Greenspan’s (2006) Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated shows the shared authorship that can come out of working with specific Holocaust survivors. Thompson (2003) discusses the issues with shared authority and argues that such an approach offers a unique, personal relationship with those we interview, with history itself, and with human experience. Projects like Greenspan’s, Ellis’, and mine highlight the relationships we form with survivors in repeated interactions over a longer period of time, where the context and interviewer are explicitly part of the process of what is being told, and where survivors take part in the
representation and interpretation of their own stories in larger academic discourses (Ellis & Rawicki, forthcoming).

Many of the issues projects such as these highlight are inspired by James Young’s (1988, 1993, 2000) critical explorations of “literary historiography.” As a rhetorically informed ethnographer, I build uniquely on the work of Ellis & Rawicki (forthcoming) and Greenspan (2010) and adapt Young’s perspective to the methods and theory behind my interviews with Holocaust survivors in order to self-reflexively question the contexts, ethics, and aesthetics of our work.

**The Particular Theory and Methods of This Work**

**Ethnographic Narrative: Theory.**

Over the past two decades ethnographers and narrative theorists have built a community of scholars and modes of scholarship dedicated to collecting, hearing, and representing marginalized, personal, and vulnerable stories. Contemporary ethnographers of communication have made the “narrative turn” and have embraced the valuative, relational power of personal stories and subjectivity (Berry, 2008; Bochner, 1994; Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Coles, 1989; Crawford, 1996; Ellis, 1998, 2004; Freeman, 2004). Work on the power of vulnerable stories and storytellers comes from multiple, related disciplines. For this project I focus on the theoretical overlap between social scientific narrative theory (Behar, 1996; Bochner, 2001, 2009; Charon, 2006; Ellis, 1995, 2008; Frank, 1995; Zaner, 2009) and the phenomenological rhetorical position of humans as storytelling animals (Payne, 2006; Fisher, 1989; Burke, 1950; Campbell, 1972, 1973). By exploring the overlap between ethnographic and rhetorical theories of storytelling, I am able to traverse perceived divides that still run deep in the consciousness of contemporary
communication scholars and academic thought generally. Specifically, a theoretical orientation that highlights the empirical, ethnographic, embodied, and relational nature of stories as well as the rhetorical, worldview-making, political nature of representing stories helps combine two classic and flourishing areas of communication scholarship (rhetoric and ethnography). Rarely, in my experience and knowledge of the field of communication, are these orientations combined, and I sense there is much overlap and productive insight that can come from merging these approaches.

I attempt to explore theoretical questions, assumptions, and extensions that arise out of taking stories and subjectivities seriously at multiple levels: in listening with individuals and their stories (Frank, 1995), in interpreting and representing stories, and in relating (and relational) stories between survivors and me. Through my interviews and representing the stories that follow, I was guided back to ideas at the core of my own worldview and understanding of human life and my motive of cultivating more livable lives for myself and those around me. I found practices and aspects of compassion emerging in the stories in which I was relationally engaged. Ultimately, I found that, through our processes of telling our stories together, new meanings did indeed emerge for each survivor I worked with and me. These relational, humane understandings and values are central justifications and aspects of narrative theory and narrative theorists (Bochner, 2001, 2012). I refrain from going into more theoretical detail here because I wish for the stories that follow in chapters four, five, and six to show more than tell, in the dialogic narratives themselves, about the values and vices of a personal storytelling frame.
Practicing Compassionate Ethnography: Method.

Most interviews with Holocaust survivors are not collaborative, intersubjective, or interpretive, and in that sense they are not interviews (Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006). Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) critique “standard” survivor interviews as being impersonal, monological, survey-style, and disengaged. The reason traditional oral history interviews do this is because they work from a modernist/classic model of history, which tries to “capture” pristine, objective reality.

Since the turn of the 20th century, historians and theorists have questioned and unsettled these notions of history for more “radically historical” and narrative perspectives (Bevin, 2006; Creegan, 1944; Foucault, 1972; Jackson, 1989; White, 1980). Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) epitomize an intersubjective take on oral history, one which values the wisdom of Holocaust survivors, by approaching individual survivors as experts about their own experience and experts about the process of interviewing. They do this by asking six Holocaust survivors who have been interviewed numerous times over the years, for numerous purposes, their opinions on being interviewed. Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) emphasize the themes they hear from survivors about doing genuine interviews, which show the need for a commitment to listening with survivors, to not just be open, but to be in process, in the moment, and in collaboration with survivors. This is a commitment similar to that found in critical ethnographic scholarship, which focuses on listen to the voices, experiences, and needs of local, often marginalized individuals and communities (Conquergood, 1991; Madison, 2005). In line with these values, therefore, I adopt a commitment to working with survivors in ways they deem important and
necessary. As a methodological commitment, I try to be sensitive to the unique relationships and needs of those I interview.

Additionally, Greenspan & Bolkosky’s (2006) work speaks of the best interviews as rare moments of presence, dialogue, being, *nowness*—moments that unmask, illuminate, and explode prior assumptions. Only through empathic listening, vulnerability, presence, and collaboration can an interview take on *a life of its own*; or as Greenspan & Bolkosky call it, a “dynamic effervescence” (p. 433). The survivors Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) interviewed talk about the need for mutual engagement, shared commitments, solidarity, and collaboration—laboring together.

Pragmatically, the methods of my research unfolded in three main stages: 1) interviews for the USF/FHM project; 2) ongoing collaborative interviews with Salomon Wainberg, Manuel Goldberg, and Sonia Wasserberger; 3) the problem of how to meaningfully represent my time spent listening to and talking with Holocaust survivors.

During stage two of my methods, I interviewed each survivor in repeated, intimate, relational, dialogic, and conversational ways, practicing and building on advances in collaborative ethnographic and oral history interviewing (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis & Ellingson, 2000; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillman-Healy, 1997; Greenspan, 2010; Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006; Madison, 2005; Rubin & Greenspan, 2006). During the interviews, I found myself interested in (and this is reflected in my dialogic interactions and the questions I ask) the cultural, theoretical, and philosophical undertones I discussed in chapter two, and these themes are expressed differently in each interview and relationship.
In personal and acute ways our interviews explore experiences and the humanistic aspects of living with memories of life during the Shoah over a lifetime (Kirby, 2008; Kushner, 2006; Rosenthal, 2006). Building on understandings from relational perspectives in the study of communication and work with Holocaust survivors, I highlight the relationships we create through telling and listening today, which helps to explicate the complex, collaborative nature of memory and storytelling (Rosenthal, 2006). Through this process, I attempted to craft stories—constructed from key moments of dialogue and interaction (the process of which is described below)—about each survivor’s unique life experiences, their process of remembering and telling (coming to terms with) their experiences, and our process of working together today. The extensive dialogue of each chapter comes from our audio-recorded conversations and/or our USF/FHM interviews5 (and I note, in each case and each chapter, the source of our narratives).

Each survivor I work with was chosen based on the willingness to continue our conversations and on the person’s unique experiences and perspectives. For example, I chose to focus on Salomon Wainberg because: 1) we related in a friendly manner immediately in conversation; 2) he and his wife Sandy intuitively understood the goals of my research (which can be shown in our first interview together); 3) Sal is a wise, thinking-man and a former accountant (note the etymological link between “accountant” and the word “account”—the oral or written depiction of events) with a rich memory, a thirst and hunger to remember more through telling, and a peaceful, compassionate will

5 The only dialogue that diverges from this is my last conversation with Sal Wainberg, which is constructed from ethnographic fieldnotes taken immediately after our conversation. I note this also in the section where this occurs in chapter four.
to explore the struggles of his history so that he and others might learn from his experience.

Second, I chose to work with Manuel Goldberg because: 1) we identified with each other immediately in our conversation together; 2) he and his partner Rachel Rivlin intuitively understood the goals of my research, found our conversations “stimulating,” and wanted to contribute; 3) Manuel and Rachel are highly intelligent and aesthetically and politically engaged individuals. Manuel is a retired psychologist who brings an experiential understanding of dealing with his own and others suffering. Rachel is a retired corporate lawyer who brings a keen and sharp vocabulary and perspective to our conversations; 4) Manuel was born in 1940, at the literal edges of the Holocaust universe, as a child in France, and his story is at the liminal edges of childhood Holocaust experience, making him an outlier and a unique case to explore in depth.

Third, Sonia Wasserberger made a good collaborator for this project because: 1) we developed a natural rapport through our conversations and interviews; 2) she and her daughter stated that they would like to continue working and talking with me; 3) she has myriad fragmented family stories that she and her daughter would like “organized” (a task I think I can help with); 4) she offers the perspective of a woman, to help balance the male survivors I work with (although both Sal and Manuel’s partners take part in the interviews and play significant roles in our conversations).

The role of place also played a significant part in the method of my interviews. My collaborative interviews took place in survivors’ homes (Saloman and Sandy Wainberg’s home, Manual Goldberg and Rachel Rivlin’s home, and Sonia Wasserberger’s home) and at favorite restaurants and family business (Ho-Ho Choy and
Yummy House in Sarasota and Tampa, Florida with Manuel and Rachel; Bagels Plus and Thai Ruby in Tampa with Sal and Sandy; and a local Tampa diner and family business—Biscayne Lighting—with Sonia). Each interview lasted two to four hours. Each research relationship is different, and I adapted the locations, times, and topics of each interview as our relationships developed, basing these differences on what I sensed each survivor wanted and what I thought would work best. Our conversations were collaborative in the sense that the survivors, their family members, and I all contributed to the topics and flows of our conversations, which tended to organically develop like a conversation with a close friend. I shared my personal life and experiences with my participants, in order to connect with them empathically and intimately, with the hope of creating a comfortable, safe context in which to share our intimate stories.

From one interview to the next, the survivors and I developed themes and topics of conversation based on our previous interactions. Most of the time, the interviews took on lives of their own, and I did not need to look to the themes I found developing from one interview to the next or ask any of the questions I had prepared. Usually, by the end of the conversations, we had spontaneously touched on most, if not all, of the themes I have written down.

I have transcribed the majority of all the interviews I have done. For each survivor, I have worked through the qualitative data we created in order to find what I sense are the key themes and issues that relate to the subjects this work aims to address.

**Notes on Representation**

From the themes that emerged, I represent the stories we told using dialogue from the interviews themselves. I work to represent the voices of each participant and myself
as meaningfully, mindfully, and honestly as I can. I do this by editing our words as 
minimally as possible, noting in brackets when I have added a word in order to help with 
the flow of the story as read. Realizing that conversation is a kind of first draft, I clean up 
and eliminate what I feel are unnecessary false starts, shifts in tense, and other issues that 
take away from the heart of what is being shared and how it is read.

I use my sense of the underlying meaning of what each of us said (which I gained 
during the interviews and through repeated acts of listening, processing, reflecting on, 
and transcribing our conversations) as my guide when making these minor edits. My goal 
is to hold as closely as I can to what I feel are powerful, telling, and/or insightful 
moments of interaction and to represent these moments in a way that translates the spirit 
of what each of us has to say. I have worked in dialogue with each participant in order to 
make sure that I am not misinterpreting or misrepresenting what they meant or wanted to 
say. This is because my central audience for these stories is the survivors themselves and 
their families and friends. Simply stated, the method I use to represent our voices is to 
consider what each survivor might think of how I have represented them. My objective is 
for each person I have interviewed to feel that I have done a compelling and canny job of 
representing each unique voice and what each of us has to share.

I always err on the side of “sticking to exactly what was said,” and none of the 
stories shared in this dissertation are “made up” (in the traditional sense of this phrase). 
That is, each story comes from our recorded conversations, and I can provide the audio 
and transcription data to “prove it.” There are, however, limits to being able to “stick to 
exactly what was said.” I believe, for example, that even the act of “verbatim” 
transcription involves conscious and unconscious value-laden choices (such as how to
punctuate spoken conversation). To grapple with these inherent limitations, I use my broader sense of our conversations, my ethnographic sensibilities, and my relationship with each survivor as tools that help me to render stories that I believe each survivor identifies as his or her story. I want each survivor to see him or herself in the story and to recognize his or her voice. As human beings rich with what I perceive as great experiential wisdom, I want to share these amazing individuals and their stories with readers as well. These are the motives that guide my method or representation.

As Bochner (2001) points out (citing Jackson, 1995), representing and reading with personal narratives, such as the ones in this dissertation evokes “an ethnography of caring” (p. 141). The central methodological goals of this work are to create unique, intimate contexts and relationships with individual survivors in order to talk about issues that may not have been discussed before, to relate to survivors in more collaborative, meaningful ways, and to read with and care for the stories heard and told.

This method, which I call compassionate storytelling with Holocaust survivors, has been a productive one and has led to a mountain of “qualitative data” and experience. In the space of a dissertation, I am only able to share a portion of what has emerged. This first step illuminates what I think are the most important insights and stories of our time together. This document represents a rich collection and the results of the experiment of engaging in this research.
Chapter Four:

Sharing “A Big Kettle of Soup:”

Compassionate Listening with Sal and Sandy Wainberg

Beginning at the End

Monday, February 20, 2012, 8:45 a.m., Sandy calls to tell me that Sal’s been in the hospital for two days and his health is declining rapidly. I knew that for the past year, Sal had been dealing with stage IV colon cancer, but I did not know how much he had deteriorated recently. Sandy tells me Sal would like to see me, and I tell her I’ll be there as soon as I can, at about 3:30 p.m. that afternoon, after I finish teaching my Interpersonal Communication class. After I hang up the phone, I don’t feel right. A few minutes later, I follow my instincts and call her back. I cancel my class and head immediately to visit Sal at St. Joseph’s Hospital, in Tampa, Florida. As I walk out of the elevator on the fifth floor, I see Sandy at the end of the hall, outside of Sal’s room. She smiles as I get closer and says, “We’re so glad you’re here.”

“I’m honored to be here,” I reply. “Thank you for wanting me here.”

She looks strong but drained and says warmly, “Sal brightened up when we told him you were coming.”

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6 A version of this chapter is in the process of being published (Patti, forthcoming) and is used here with permission of the publisher.
Her words fill my heart, and I manage to say, “I want you and Sal to know what a profound effect our time together has had on me, how much talking with him has changed my life.”

**Two Years Earlier . . .**

Monday, March 1, 2010, 9:30 a.m. Location: Wainberg residence.

It’s a beautiful spring day in Tampa, Florida—the first in recent memory, after the coldest winter on record. I am headed to meet Salomon and Sandra Wainberg for the first time. After Carolyn Ellis, my dissertation supervisor, interviewed Mr. Wainberg for our Holocaust survivor oral history project with the University of South Florida Libraries and Florida Holocaust Museum (USF/FHM), she sensed that he and I would connect well. She had a feeling he might make a good collaborator for my dissertation research on cultivating a compassionate, ethnographic approach to working with Holocaust survivors. Having conducted eleven videotaped and archived oral history interviews for the USF/FHM project as a communication scholar, my dissertation seeks to collaborate more conversationally with three survivors in particular in order to form ongoing relationships and hear things not traditionally heard in oral history interviews. I’ve spoken on the phone with Sandy to arrange the interview and already know their motive to talk with me: “We want to share Sal’s story with as many people as we can,” she said. Thoughts swirl in my mind as I drive into a charming, upper-middle class community on a golf course in the semi-rural Tampa suburb of Lutz, about fifteen miles northwest of the city.

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7 Those interested in the formal oral history of Salomon Wainberg can learn more from the Shoah Foundation Institute interview he did in 1995 and his University of South Florida Libraries/Florida Holocaust Museum (USF/FHM) interview he did in 2010, found here: [http://guides.lib.usf.edu/ohpi#doi=F60-00021](http://guides.lib.usf.edu/ohpi#doi=F60-00021).
I arrive early and Sal is still out, but Sandy takes me in and shows me their immaculately kept home. Lovely and varied art and artifacts from their travels adorn the walls and display cases: traditional Jewish pieces—paintings and richly colored glasswork—as well as Hindu prints and Asian brass items. I sit with Sandy at her white kitchen table, which matches the white curtains drawn open on the window beside. We start chatting, my audio recorder already on. Pictures of their daughter and son and three granddaughters watch over us from the kitchen shelves.

Sandy and I connect immediately as I explain my project. “I want to find people where we can just connect and where it’s hopefully rewarding for the survivors as well as me. I think that’s something that’s missing in the documentation of the Holocaust.”

She says, “I agree.”

Excited that she seems to intuitively understand my intention, I add, “In the kind of standard ‘tell-me-your-life-story’ interview, they don’t broach topics like ‘What’s your opinion on how the Holocaust is thought about today in American culture?’ And all of these movies about the Holocaust, you know. Starting in the ‘70s there was a miniseries called Holocaust on NBC, and then there’s Schindler’s List in 1993. I just think understanding survivors’ opinions on these things is something that’s missing.”

She picks up my thought and says, “Well the interesting thing about the movies is that my introduction to the Holocaust—being I was born in the United Stated and not having the experience myself—was with Judgment at Nuremberg. When I saw that movie, that was the first.”

“Wow,” I say, drawn to her openness and how she words things. Just then, Sal arrives home, entering through the garage door, situated directly next to the kitchen
where Sandy and I are seated. Without a break, he sits down. He’s jovial and his presence takes center stage.

“Have you started without me?” Sal jokes. I fumble a bit, tell him no. I explain that we can talk about whatever we want with no thought about beginning and ending, and I give him the Institutional Review Board release form for our project. I feel that he is wary of me at first. His labored breathing, audible on the recording, indicates his slight agitation. *I’ve accosted him*, I think—already being there talking with Sandy, not allowing him to arrive home peacefully or any time to collect his thoughts. We begin anyway.

I reiterate: “I’m hoping that we can have a conversation and then things will come out of that conversation that seem interesting to you. And that’s my goal at this point.” I ask him, “Do you have any questions?”

Waiting for me to take the lead he says, “No, go ahead.”

I ask anxiously, “That makes sense?”

Sal’s response, I would come to find out, is quintessential: “Well, I’ll find out if it makes sense as it progresses.” Sandy and I laugh at Sal’s direct honesty. He continues, “But I’m willing.”

Soon after my awkward start, Sal begins to see what Sandy already felt. By twenty minutes into our first conversation, we start connecting. Sal clarifies his motive to tell: “This has been ever since I retired. I have nothing else to do. I do a lot of volunteer work in addition to the [Florida Holocaust] Museum. Whatever I can do regardless of how silly it is, how disgusting it is, how wonderful it is, how terrific it is—anything I can
do to let one more person find out about the Holocaust, I will go to any length. So if you want me to meet with whoever, I’ll meet.” Sandy laughs at his statement.

I respond, “I really appreciate your willingness to talk with me, and also I hope that through this process—and this is kind of a selfish hope—that our time together is meaningful to you.”

“It is,” he reassures me.

“Absolutely,” says Sandy, adding, “I told you that before. I said every time he speaks it makes it more comfortable for him to say.”

Sal is explicit, “Speaking about it with you is meaningful for two reasons: number one, you have brought out things that hadn’t come about before. But more importantly, I have the hope that in doing your work maybe a few more people are gonna’ find out.”

Our conversations flowed, ranging over many topics. We talked about his experience, memory, and history; about his and Sandy’s relationship as it related to his telling; about popular culture; and about why and how it was that we felt called to share his story. Our interviews spanned two years, and I audio recorded five of our meetings, totaling more than ten hours of audio data.\(^8\) But we left many of our casual meetings as friendly, unrecorded conversations. Our relationship and discussions deepened with each meeting, leading to our final interaction.

My goal here is to show some of “the meat” (to use Sal’s words) of our time together—what happened between us, the distinct nature of our collaboration, and the heart of what we have to share. I do this by highlighting five key themes or moments from our interactions, using our conversational voices—Sal’s, Sandy’s, and my own—as

\(^8\) Various transcriptions of our interviews total more than 200 pages of text.
recorded. In the first I show how Sal came to tell his story, first to Sandy and then to the world; second, I note in Sal’s words what telling has brought him; third, I share a key insight from our time together; fourth, I demonstrate the relationship and connection we formed; and fifth, I answer the question, Why do we tell?

These themes provide the context for my ethnographic telling of our final conversation, which expresses the life-and-death heart of our work in both symbolic and embodied ways. My method adds particular voices to the collaborative witnessing approaches demonstrated by Ellis and Rawicki (forthcoming), Greenspan (2010), Greenspan and Bolkosky (2006), High (2009), Rawicki and Ellis (2011), Rubin and Greenspan (2006), Sheftel and Zembrzycky (2010), and the Montreal Life Stories project⁹. As High (2009) points out, authors in this lineage are “not only self-aware, continually reflecting on their location in the research process; they are writing deeply personal articles” (p. 15). This is a deeply personal chapter about my relationship with a Holocaust survivor that goes beyond traditional categories of interviewer-interviewee and diverges from traditional modes of scholarly representation.

I begin with a condensed version of Sal’s experience during the Second World War to provide essential historical context for the themes that follow.

**The Wainberg/Boruchowicz Family during World War II**

Sal (pronounced “Saul”—it bothered me when I heard one of his rabbis call him “Sal” as in “Sally”) is a 74-year-old Jewish Holocaust survivor born April 15, 1936, in the small, Eastern Polish shtetl of Zelechów, Poland. Sal would later tell me that the town he was born in wasn’t even a shtetl; it was smaller, more rural. His name at birth was

⁹ [http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/](http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/)
Shalom Wainberg (spelled Szulim Wajnberg in Polish). Sal’s father Chaim Meyer and mother Perla were successful merchants before the war, selling goods at their regional wholesale store, which had been passed down over generations on Sal’s mother’s side of the family—the Boruchowicz side. Sal told me that the family store had a monopoly on sugar, cigarettes, and herring. Their house was situated across the street from the business. At the time of the war, Sal had two older sisters, Riwka and Sara, and a younger brother, Abraham.

Sal’s first vivid childhood memory has a specific date—September 1, 1939—the day Germans first invaded Poland and war found his town. It was the first time he had seen an airplane. As Sal marveled at the planes overhead, he was hoping to see a helicopter that day, something he learned about from his sickly, bookish cousin but could not imagine. That night, Sal’s family fled, hiding first in the attic of his mother’s sister’s fiancé’s bicycle and sewing machine shop with thirty-nine others. They stayed there for sixteen days as their town was destroyed.

Following this, Sal’s father, mother, and siblings moved by cover of night about seven miles away to Wilczka. There they hid in the cellar of the Sokols, a Polish family the Wainbergs paid to feed and hide them. Mr. Sokol was the brother-in-law of a family friend, Edward Turek, a man Sal called an “angel.” For two years during the war, Sal and his family hid in that cellar—what Sal called “the grub” (meaning grave, dungeon, or pit in Yiddish), eating “nothing soup”—with another Jewish family, the Popolskis. At one point, Mr. Sokol allowed a wounded Russian soldier to hide with the families in the cellar. Having no rapport with the adults (because he was seen as another mouth to feed), the Russian man connected with the bored children, Sal in the main. He taught Sal
Russian songs and they carved a chess set together out of branches that Mr. Sokol brought for the Russian. The man demonstrated to Sal what each chess piece looked like by molding it out of bread first before eating it. Sal soaked up everything the Russian taught him. Once healed, the mysterious man left and was never heard from again.

Time became meaningless as the months and years passed until, one night, bandits found Sal’s family. Sal’s mother and father believed that Edward Turek’s brother, Vladislav, had given the family’s location away. The bandits murdered Sal’s aunt Gitel Schiffman, his sister Riwka, and two young men hidden with Sal’s family—“the Popolski boys.” Facing death, Sal’s father improvised a “bubbe-meise” (a fictional story) to spare the lives of his family by promising to lead the bandits to what they were after—the supposed Boruchowicz fortune. After years of paying to hide, there was no fortune left, but Sal’s father’s story allowed him and his family to escape just before dawn.

The Wainbergs spent the next few months wandering and hiding in rye and wheat fields, suffering sun-burn and near-deadly thirst and hunger, surviving on cunning and the hard kernels from the fields. Before sunrise on August 2, 1944, they heard voice in the distance. Eight years old, Sal recognized them as Russian voices, and he acted as the tiny translator for his family, telling the soldiers, “We’re Jewish—we’re Jews: Yevreyski.” The Wainbergs were liberated. Soon after, Sal’s family immigrated to Costa Rica and opened a new store. By sixteen, Sal moved to Detroit to study at a Yeshiva, nearly becoming an orthodox rabbi, before he became, in his words, “unorthodox.” Years later, as Sal got his start in finance and studied at University of Miami, he met Sandy, a pretty Jewish-American girl, and in 1965 they wed. Sandy knew Sal’s family had a “dark secret,” but she loved him enough not to pry, even though she felt like an outsider.
I. Coming to Tell Sandy and the World

During our first interview, I ask Sal if he feels telling his story publically has changed him. He says, “Our life definitely has changed because I think she [Sandy] understands a lot of my shortcomings now, a lot of my bad habits. So that definitely has changed. I have also changed in that I realized how, I guess, irritating I can sometimes be.”

Sandy responds, laughing, “How, your ‘coming out’ has changed?” We join in laughing at her wording. She continues, “You can’t imagine. We were married in 1965. I knew he was a survivor, but I never asked him anything about his survival. I did that knowingly and with respect, because I saw that if I would bring up something like that it would hurt him. He was uncomfortable with it. So I never went there. Well, we were married for ten years and this, his being a survivor, was only something in his life. It didn’t impact mine, except that it was a huge question mark. There is a whole lot of my husband that I don’t know about. And it does bother you that you didn’t know it, but there’s this feeling of respect and feeling of ‘don’t go there because we’re gonna’ hurt.’ So we were married for ten years, and one of the joys that we share together is the love of travel. We were going on one of our many trips that we take. This time we were going to Eastern Europe. This was back in ’73, right?”

“Yeah,” Sal says, his voice a whisper, letting her tell the story for the moment.

“Okay, ’73, early on in being able to visit communist Russia, Poland, and East and West Berlin, it wasn’t a common place where people went in those days. So we were very, very excited about going there. I was so excited to go as a cultural experience, to be able to experience what it would be like to be in a communist country. But it didn’t really
occur to me that Sal had another purpose in going there. He had made contact with the family in Poland that saved him. He was going over there to make contact, to see them.”

Sal adds, “To visit and to show her where I was born.”

“To show me—to show me where he was,” she says.

Sal finishes her sentence in a deep, gravelly voice, “Where I came from.”

“Yeah,” I say, amazed, saying as little as I can for the moment to allow their co-telling to continue.

Sandy goes on, “I was totally unaware of this. So we got on the plane and we have a long plane ride. In those days Sal couldn’t read on an airplane. He would get airsick. So what else can you do?”

“They didn’t have movies then,” he jokes.

“Talk to your partner,” Sandy says. She adds, “So he, at that point, after ten years of marriage, told me his survival story. I was on the plane dumbfounded. I could not absorb everything that he was telling me. It was too—it was too painful; it was too shocking; it was so unexpected, and he told me we were gonna’ meet this family. I was amazed. Okay, so we went to Poland first?”

“Yeah, Warsaw. That was the first stop,” Sal says.

“Alright,” she continues, “We had traveled to many places in the world before this. And Sal is a very strong, independent, unafraid, you know, a know-it-all kind of person. He is gonna’ rule the world kind of thing. Very, very self-confident. When he got off the plane in Poland he became a child. He held on to me. He was shaking. He was, and I—I’ve never seen him like this. I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ He couldn’t put it into words. But it occurred to me, finally, that he was frightened. I said ‘What are you
frightened of?’ You know this is so many years later, twenty-five years later. I said ‘Why are you so frightened?’ He said to me, which I didn’t realize, it didn’t occur to me at all, that he was of draft age and he was carrying a passport that said he was born in Poland. He was afraid that the Polish government was going to capture him and put him in the army."

“Wow,” I say.

“There was no, just no sense to what he said,” she clarifies.

“Well, no,” he admits.

“He really thought that this was gonna’ happen!” Sandy says.

Sal wants me to know, “You have to, when you listen to my story—you might realize that the way we finally left Poland was running away.”

Sandy picks up the line of thought, “So his running away, his escape from Poland, and the shame, or the fear.”

Sal emphasizes, “The fear.”

Sandy continues, “Or the whatever that he felt at that point was transferred into this feeling of utter desperation, or fear, or something.”

Sal repeats once more, “Fear.”

“He was just scared.”

“I was walking on glass,” he says.

When I ask Sal how he became involved with telling his story publicly he says, “It wasn’t really ‘till the museum got me to speak out that I really started—and like I said before, the first few times was murder. I would come home exhausted from the experience. Whereas now I come home and feel satisfied that perhaps I changed the life
of one of the kids. Stuff like that. ‘Cause I do, when I talk to the kids I do include some preaching of tolerance and stuff like that.”

I feel like I know what Sal means and respond, “Yes, I think that’s so important coming from someone who has been through that experience. I think that for me it’s not only your story…”

“No,” Sal agrees and sees where I’m going.

I continue, “that we can learn from but your perspective…”

“Right,” Sal says.

I add, “Living with that story. I think that that wisdom—yeah.” Sal and I connect with our motives: to tell this story in order to learn for ourselves and possibly help another person. I ask Sal to clarify how telling has shaped him: “You say, ‘Telling brings me more than relief, it washes my soul.’ That’s really interesting to me.”

He takes the conversational baton and runs with it, responding, “There’s two things that have happened to me since I started talking at the museum. I think the most important part is that I don’t dwell on it like I used to, on the bad parts and stuff. It almost has become a story as far as I’m concerned. As a matter of fact, one of the problems I have with the museum now is they want to restrict my time. And I refuse. Because I say I have to tell the story. I can’t just, you know, do like this [chops his hand in the air three times]. But more importantly, there are a lot of things, a lot of names, a lot of places that have become clearer in my mind.”

Sal tells me a few moments later, “But I think the other thing is, and I say this to the kids a lot of times, you know. When you first start talking about [the] Holocaust you’ll say, ‘This should never happen again.’ But it’s happening again almost every day.
And I think that’s what we have to realize, too. So until everybody knows and realize[s] that it happened and that it could happen again, I think it will happen. And that’s the sad part.” Later he adds, “And before that [beginning to tell publically], whenever I would have an inclination to tell, nobody wanted to listen. Now [at the FHM] I was in a crowd that they wanted to listen, so it’s very different.” Sal gives a lot of credit to having an audience willing to listen to Steven Spielberg: “Really, it was the Schindler’s List and the Spielberg. I think he should be canonized because he brought the awareness. Okay?”

“He made it okay to want to know,” I say.

“He made it okay to want to know and he made it okay to want to tell. Okay? Because, basically, it was in 1999 when I started with the museum. I went to my niece’s—it was when she was in high school, and I told my story. But it was bum, bum, bum, bum. It was fifteen/twenty minutes. It wasn’t until the museum that I first told the story. And, Chris, I’ll guarantee you I’m not the only one.”

“Pretty much every survivor I’ve spoken with has a similar story of coming to become a storyteller, coming to have an audience to tell to,” I agree.

Sal reasserts, “If you want to thank somebody—Spielberg.”

“It’s pretty interesting that you say that for so many reasons. As I’ve been reading more about this, academics are pretty critical of Steven Spielberg and the film (Bartov, 1997). They say the story was from a German perspective, that the Holocaust is the backdrop. And you’re shaking your head.”

“That’s not true. Yes, he had to use that venue, but look what he did!”
“It doesn’t make it any less important,” I agree. “Actually, one of the things that historians will admit is that the facts of that movie are very accurate. Even the names of the people in the shops are—it’s down to that level of detail,” I say.

“Right,” Sal agrees.

“And for that to be also a Hollywood movie is a pretty miraculous thing,” I say.

“That is important to the historians. To me that’s not important at all. To me what’s important is he brought the awareness, where people actually started asking. Then, when they ask, people feel better about telling. So to me it’s,” Sal pauses for a moment and then continues, having switched gears, now directing his thought toward our project. “And [you] should probably use that [idea] in your dissertation—you’re welcome.”

Stunned and pleased that he is concerned with my dissertation and explicit about including this particular thought (that he is less concerned with what historians think and more concerned with appreciating the awareness he feels came from the popularity of Schindler’s List) I respond: “I, I, I will, actually. I will.”

II. What Telling has Brought Sal: “A Big Kettle of Soup”

Reflecting on Sal’s different phases of memory and telling over his life I say, “So, you’re a young man, you’re very busy. Then when you retire things changed, the museum comes into play, speaking to students comes into play. Now when you think about your memory, it seems like there are some memories that are still as vivid as if they happened yesterday. You can see these—you’re following images in your mind when you’re telling them.”

“Right,” Sal says softly.

I ask, “Can you talk to me about that? Or what is that like?”
Here Sal shares with me what has become my model for the mind and what motivates us to remember and tell our experience. He says, “Somehow, I have a feeling, if I continue telling, there are going to be other discoveries that I make in my mind. Some of the stuff that I remember are quite—I don’t know what to say—quite alarming details. Like, I could almost, I could almost see [Mr.] Popolski spitting up blood, you know, right in front of us. On the other hand are the things that I try to remember that I can’t remember. My mom had five sisters, and I can only remember one of them dying. This little cousin of mine, same name as mine, six years younger than me—I don’t know when he died. It’s something that I’ve tried to get my sister to tell me and she either doesn’t know or doesn’t want to know. Unfortunately, there you go again, I didn’t think of asking when my mom could have told me. In those days I was too busy with school, with girls, with whatever it was to think about that. And that bothers me. I’m hoping maybe someday it will.”

Sandy finished his thought, “It’ll come.”

I agree, “It’ll come.”

Sal: “It’ll come.”

“I think it’s in there,” I say.

Sal explains, “Oh, I’m sure it’s in there. It’s just a question of how to get it out.

The mind is like a big kettle of soup.”

“Mm-hmm,” I say, marveling at his metaphor, reflecting on the “nothing soup” he ate in the “grub.”
He continues, “In that, if you dig long enough, you’ll find the meat, and you’ll find the stuff that you like.” Sandy and I laugh at how enlightening and Sal-like his statement is.

Sandy says, “There you go,” letting me know this is a big insight.

“That’s one of those quotes,” I say, still laughing.

Sal finishes his thought, “And that’s why I’m digging.”

Sandy: “Ah, boy!”

“I love that,” I say. “You make my job so easy when you say things like that.” Sal and I laugh.

III. A Key Insight from Our Time Together

Thirty seven minutes into our second interview Sal comes back to an example he gave in our first—that while telling his story at the museum in the early 2000s he recalled the lost name he had been searching for in his memory: Vladislav Turek. He tells me, “More importantly [by telling] there are a lot of things, a lot of names, a lot of places that have become clearer in my mind. And there’s one example that I have given in response.”

I say, “Is this the Vladislav Turek [example]?”

“Right,” Sal says.

“My question to you here is,” I say as gently as I can, “you do use that name in the [1995] Shoah interview the first time.”

Sal responds, “No, I say Edward Turek.”

Having recently watched his Shoah interview, I am confident and explain, “You say Vladislav Turek as well.”
“Oh my gosh,” Sandy exclaims. “We have to go back and listen.”

“I thought that was so interesting,” I say.

Sal, showing what to me was incredible flexibility and openness responds, “I had completely forgotten that name. I mean, not that I left it out of my mind. I was thinking a lot about what was this—you see Edward Turek was the angel, the good guy. Vladislav Turek was the bad guy. My mom and dad suspected that he was the one who gave us away to those bandits and everything. I could not remember his name, until one day you [Sandy] were there [while he told his story to some children at the museum].”

She says, “And it came out.”

He continues, “It just came out like I saw it written in the sky. There were other things like that, that came out.”

We all start talking at once, excited by the discovery. Sandy is most audible saying, “That’s very psychological. Isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Sal says.

She says, “We have to go back and listen to that interview.”

“Yeah, definitely,” he says.

“Yeah,” I say, “because I heard it in the interview. I think it’s on tape two, towards the beginning when you use Vladislav Turek.”

Sal says, “It’s very possible, you know.”

Appreciating Sal’s openness I say, “Yeah, exactly. Memory’s tricky.”

Sal says, “The mind plays a lot of tricks on ya.”
“It does, it does,” I say, adding, “That’s kind of the most interesting part.” Because to tell it one hundred percent the way it was is an impossible thing. But to be able to understand the intricacies of your experience of telling it—maybe if Vladislav’s name did come up in the Shoah [interview] but you forgot about it, that’s still interesting—that it came back out later. You forgot even that you knew that you said it.”

“Yeah, right,” Sal says.

Sandy interjects, “That’s fascinating.”

“That makes it more interesting, yeah,” I say.

After rechecking Sal’s Shoah Foundation interview, I can confirm that this moment happens on tape three, not tape two as I told Sal and Sandy—my memory, it seems, is just as suspect.

**IV. Our Connection and Relationship**

As our interviews progressed over the months and years, our friendship blossomed. Sal, being a kind man and generous host, always asked if I wanted anything to eat or drink while I was there. Each time I happily accepted his offers and we shared grilled cheese sandwiches, coffee with a little hot chocolate mixed in, and, on one occasion, the “Sal special,” scrambled eggs mixed with steamed cauliflower and onions.

By an hour and thirty-five minutes into our second conversation, it’s clear to me that Sal, Sandy, and I are becoming friends. Sandy tells me, “The grandkids know that whatever needs to be fixed, whatever problem they have, whatever it is, they go directly to their grandfather. They know exactly that he’ll have the right thing, and he does, or he

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10 My statement here parallels Tony Kushner’s (2006) insight that “the mythologies created within individual life stories, rather than being seen as an inherent weakness, have been celebrated as one of their great strengths” (p. 282).
improvises. What I see in what he’s improvising to make better or whatever, I know it’s gonna’ be horrible. But, for the few minutes that he’s doing it for the children, the children love it,” she laughs. “Right?”

Sal responds, “That’s what counts.”

“Yep,” she laughs.

I say, “I like that—that’s good to know. Next time I have a problem I’ll know where to go.” Sandy and I get a big kick out of this.

Eight minutes into our third recorded interview, this time out to dinner at a Thai restaurant in Tampa, Sal tells me, “I have been interviewed I don’t know how many times. And I know that each time I am interviewed something new comes out. Sometimes it’s just a memory. And sometimes it’s the way people ask questions that it comes out.”

I agree and add, “And sometimes just one moment to the next something new comes out.”

Sal says, “Right. When people ask questions that I really have to think about, the things that came out would have never came out another way.”

I start saying, “Yeah, that’s what’s so exciting to me,” when Sandy jumps in.

“Right, it’s probing questions and the way to do a good interview. And you do the same thing,” she tells me.

“Thank you. Thank you,” I reply.

Sandy continues, “You talk around it.” A moment later she adds, “So this is what we’re talking about.”

I pick up my earlier thought, “That’s what’s so exciting to me—to work with you two. Because I can see Sal making sense of things—like new each time you think about
it. That’s what I’m interested in: How do people make sense of any life, let alone a particularly compelling life that speaks to a whole historical issue? So watching you make sense of these issues is to me more interesting than even reading philosophies about how to have meaning in life or anything like that. I think we can learn more through talking—to any individual, but particularly to one who’s looking to find meaning for himself.”

Sandy adds, “And friendly—the safe atmosphere—that we feel with you. I think that’s more, more than anything else.”

Sal: “Yeah.”

Sandy: “Because other people ask maybe the same questions but it won’t be the same response. It won’t be the same hearer. They ask it.”

Sal picks up, “Yeah. They ask it with a different spirit.”

Sandy: “They ask it with a different spirit.”

To clarify that I understand them I ask, “Is it like an openness, a vulnerability?”

Sal responds, “Yeah, a vulnerability. But also…”

“A disinterest,” she inserts. “An asking a question but not interested.”

About an hour and a half into our fourth interview, Sal gave me a compliment that has stuck with me. I now mention it when I teach and talk about my research and perspective on interviewing. Sal said, “You know what, you’re a good interviewer. You elicit answers. They said it about Barbara Walters.”

I respond, “Mm-hmm. Well that’s, that’s…”

Sal continues, “Maybe you’re in the wrong profession?”
This leads me to talk to him about Carolyn Ellis’ and my perspective on interviewing and compassionate qualitative methods. Sal is happy that I will teach my students this approach and that, in turn, they will improve in their own ways on what I teach them.

By our last recorded interview, Sal’s become like a grandparent-friend-guide to me. I mark this by the fact that he wants to know what I think of his cooking. He asks, “Are you really enjoying it? Tell me the truth.”

“The book?” I ask, thinking he is talking about the draft of the book he is having written about his history, which he let me read to get my opinion. He was clear that he only let me and Sandy read it, not even his brother.

“No,” he says.

Seeing what he means I say, “Oh, this [the eggs and cauliflower]? For sure! And the book as well. I did enjoy it.”

Continuing his friendly banter he asks, “How’s your, eh—thesis going?”

I say honestly, “It is, ah—it is challenging, definitely challenging.”

Sal gets a big kick out of this and says, “Listen, anything worthwhile is challenging. That I learned.”

“I definitely felt, through reading this book, you know—I understood how much work you’ve done throughout your life. I understood a little bit how hard you work. You know I’m at a point in my life where—I did grow up having a lot of privileges that you didn’t have, that even my parents didn’t have. I think it’s because of that [that] my generation takes a little longer to mature.”

“Yeah,” Sal agrees.
I elaborate, “So I’m kind of, you know, I’m older. I’m almost thirty but I’m still, you know, maybe where you were when you were six years old, something like that, in terms of maturity. So this has been a big maturation process. I think that’s what I’m learning, is just the day-in-day-out effort that it takes to do anything that’s worthwhile, like you’re saying. I have nothing to complain about with my work. You did so much work, and that’s been inspirational too.”

He shares with me, “I had to make a lot of decisions which at the time people might have said were the wrong decisions. But history said that they were the right decisions. Like job switching or moving.”

At forty minutes into our last recorded interview I say to Sandy, “Something that’s been interesting for me to experience is, since I met Sal, you know, our interactions have always been pretty open and emotional sort[s] of interactions.”

“Mm-hmm,” Sandy nods in agreement.

“Yeah,” Sal says, almost to say no question.

“I feel like I’ve seen a side of you that not too many other people have seen,” I tell him.

Sandy says, “Yeah, you have definitely seen a side of Sal that nobody else has seen.” She quickly adds, “I mean, I’ve seen.”

I clarify, “‘Cause I hear the stories about how, you know—when you say something it happens. When you say something, that’s kind of the law, that’s what’s gonna’ happen. But in my experience you seemed like a softy to me,” I tell him with a warm smile. They both laugh—Sandy’s is a belly laugh, I imagine because she’s never heard anyone refer to Sal as a “softy.”
Sal explains to me, “A lot of people, including that class that we were [in] with your people [Dr. Ellis’ graduate class that we visited together], they were asking, ‘Well, why is that?’ It’s because I don’t throw out my opinions. I think about it, and it takes me—sometimes it takes me a long time to make a decision. But once I’ve made a decision it’s generally a very good decision because I’ve given it a lot of thought. And that’s what makes something different.”

*Figure 1.1* Sal and Sandy Wainberg on Vacation in California, 2007
V. Why do We Tell?

I ask Sal, “So as we move into the future, what do you think? What’s essential that we remember from your experience and from survivors’ experiences at this moment? What do we need to know today?”

“Let me tell you something before I can develop that answer,” Sal tells me.

“Yeah, sorry,” I say, adding, “The questions I don’t know the answer to I ask you.”

He says, “I, as well as I think any Holocaust survivor that understands, are very, very grateful to you, to Dr. Ellis—people who basically, the way I see it, dedicate your lives to the remembrance of the Holocaust. We never had that. All we had was deniers. Okay? I think if there’s one thing that you should strive for—you and Dr. Ellis and everybody else—it’s that somehow it shouldn’t stop with you. Because at the museum whenever Sandy Mermelstein [tour director for the FHM and daughter of the museum’s founder] introduces me she says to the kids, ‘You’re very privileged because your kids probably will never be able to hear a survivor.’ That’s the very truth. So if you can develop a cadre of students who follow you, they’re gonna’ take your course, they’re gonna’ read your thesis, they are gonna’ take their time to go to the library and hear me. Whatever it is, I think that’s probably the biggest accomplishment that you can accomplish.”

What I say to Sal next has become what I think of as the basic thesis of my dissertation: “I think you just made things very clear for me. Like one of my big questions is, ‘Why remember? Why retell these stories?’ We tell these stories to
communicate, to connect one person to another person, to connect one generation to another generation.”

A few minutes later, I ask again in a different way: “What do we learn? What do you hope that I learn from telling these stories, listening to these stories, struggling with the burden of it?”

“I’m glad you asked me that,” Sal says, “because you have to understand that we really weren’t cowards. Okay? We really were brave to have the will and the strength and the cunning to survive. A coward would have said, ‘Here, run me over with the tank.’ And a lot of ‘em did. To me they’re cowards because as long as you live you must have, and this is what I was trying to tell my daughter the other day, you must have the desire to live.” Here Sal strikes something deep inside me, something that’s taken me thirty years to realize, something I had to learn by studying stories and communication and their limits in human experience.

“The will to live! The will to…” I say.

Sal jumps in, “It’s not only the will to live. The, the, the ambition—the fortuitiveness to do whatever is necessary to do.”

I ask, “So would you say that life itself is the meaning? Like when somebody says, ‘What’s the meaning of life?’ Would you say, ‘Life itself’?”


I add, “Again, that’s kind of a passing-things-on. Stories are kind of symbolic appropriation, a kind of symbolic lineage.”

“Absolutely, absolutely,” Sal says.

“This is blowing my mind,” I say.
Sal laughs and says, “Hope it doesn’t do it here.”

So what, you might be asking, is the big breakthrough in these simple words? It’s a breakthrough that in some senses Viktor Frankl (1946/1985) and many in the field of communication overlook. It is not “man’s search for meaning.” It’s the will to experience and express life itself. The experience of life. This is a “beyond” that is larger than the human symbolic capacity and from which our stories emerge. Sharing experience is the messy, interconnected, relational process—as Leon and Greenspan (2010) note—of “making a story” of what is “not a story” (p. 3-4, 20). In the poignant words of Bruce Springsteen (2009), from his song “Life Itself:”

Why do the things that we treasure most slip away in time?
'Til to the music we grow deaf and to God's beauty blind
Why do the things that connect us slowly pull us apart?
'Til we fall away in our own darkness, stranger to our own hearts
You were life itself, rushing over me
Life itself, the wind in the black elms
Life itself, in your heart and in your eyes
I can't make it without you.

Sitting in awe and wonder at the vastness of life itself, magnified beautifully and complexly in an individual life, is a big part of what my time with Sal was about—it’s a big part of the wisdom I take from this experience. But that was not all.

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11 I am thankful to Henry Greenspan for bringing back to my awareness the complex, relational process of his and Leon’s formulation of “making a story.” He details this process and the different, relational paradigm it represents on page 234. Fittingly, and adding another level of relationality to this story, Hank’s and my relationship and his input have helped me to better represent Sal’s and my interconnected, relational insight about sharing the beyond of life itself.
Through telling and retelling his story, Sal was forced to reflect on his own prejudices—namely, his hatred of Polish people. Both he and Sandy showed that through thinking about and publically telling his story, Sal had indeed transformed his thinking. Sal explained to me, “That was a definite hatred you could say [Sal’s feeling toward the Sokols as a young man]. I hated the Polish people in general because my immediate family died at the hands of Polish people not the Germans. So I had that [hatred] for the longest time. Also as part of telling it I guess, I realized that people are people. There are these things that happen. You can’t blame a whole population for what some bad guys did. So I went, and I’m still going through that [transformation].”

Sandy says “Sal has come to the realization that not all people—not to generalize. Not all people are bad. You can’t categorize all Poles as…”

“Because you have to take the example,” he interjects.

“Right,” she says.

I’ll end this section with one final example of why we are telling this particular story. It comes from what Sandy thought would make a good title to Sal’s book. She suggests the title, “I Don’t Have a Number, I Have a Story.” I agree that would make a great title.

Sal says, “With all the kids asking about my number—not the adults so much but the kids.”

I add, “I think that that is a powerful title because, for a long time—for so long we defined a Holocaust survivor as someone who’s in a camp, someone with a number, and other people were disavowed as survivors.”

“Right,” Sandy says: “There’re not real survivors, they were just people.”
Sal explains, “Everybody asks, ‘What camp were you in?’”

“People don’t understand that a survivor is not just a camp survivor,” Sandy says.

**Beginning (to “Really” Listen to Sal) at the End**

Sandy opens the door and I follow her into Sal’s bright hospital room, illuminated with natural light pouring in from the large window on the right side of Sal’s bed. Robyn, Sal’s daughter, and Andrew, his son, are already in the room. We briefly exchange quiet handshakes and introductions. Robyn, a pediatric physician, sees me notice that the permanently affixed crucifix in the upper right corner of the room is covered with a sheet. “The crucifix is a standard fixture in most rooms at St. Joseph’s,” she informs me. “They attach them so people can’t take them home.” We both smile. Sal’s act of resistance makes me happy yet my eyes fill with tears that don’t yet fall. He is bathed in light from the window.

“Hey, buddy. How are you?” I say to Sal, still standing next to Robyn.

“Chris, Chris, you’re half the man you were since I saw you,” Sal jokes, referring to my thinness.

“Oh, no, you’re just used to seeing me dressed up. I look bigger in formal clothes,” I say.

“Oh, okay,” he says, moving on. “So nice to see you. Come, sit.” He motions with his left hand to the two chairs on the left side of the bed. Robyn allows me to sit closest to Sal for the moment and takes the seat to the left of me, and I place my hand on Sal’s forearm. Andrew sits in the corner behind us. Sandy is on the other side of the bed

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12 The story here is constructed based on detailed ethnographic field notes I took immediately after leaving the hospital, while still in the parking garage. I do my best in this story to represent, as richly as possible, the words and actions of the characters as well as the situation.
holding a Styrofoam cup filled with water that has a straw sticking out, ready whenever Sal wants a sip.

Sal’s hair is still thick and curly, despite nearly a year of aggressive chemo. *Stubborn and strong, just like Sal,* I think. Except it’s no longer dark grey. The front is snow white and the back a light grey. His skin is ashen and yellow. Bathed in the natural light, Sal’s eyes glow a pale and bright blue-green. His unnatural thinness exaggerates his enormous hands, which still look powerful—like I’m used to seeing the rest of him. Sal’s normally booming voice is quiet today but still low, slow, and full of character and rasp—even more so than usual. When he is hit periodically by acute pain, he simply closes his eyes for a few seconds, breathes, and continues on, not letting it interrupt his train of thought. “Sal, I can see that you’re in pain, and still you’re so generous with your conversation,” I say to him.

“This is more important,” he responds. “Listen.”

My goal today is to be present for Sal. But I’m surprised as he dives directly into a deep, philosophical conversation about listening and being heard. (In hindsight, I shouldn’t have been surprised, as this is how Sal and I always talked.)

Sal looks me in the eyes: “Chris, I will be at peace if I feel one person has really listened, has really tried to understand. You have.”

Chills race through my body as I am overwhelmed and honored. For a moment I’m speechless, break my intense focus on Sal, and notice Sandy and Robyn smiling at me reassuringly. I finally manage, “Sal, that is a lot of responsibility, and I’m humbled.” I take a breath and continue, “I can tell you that, through listening and re-listening to all of our conversations, that I finally feel like I’m beginning to listen to what you’re saying. I
am finally beginning to hear what you’re saying. And this is the main theme in all our conversations. They always seem to come back to our struggle to listen and to tell.”

“Yes,” Sal responds.

“I imagine that you must feel profound satisfaction, having shared your story with so many,” I add. “I think you’ve changed many lives. You’ve changed mine, that’s for sure. Sal, you’ve helped me to mature, to become a man.”

“Yes, Chris. This is it. Don’t confuse it. Life, even after the Holocaust, even with all I’ve seen, even today, is about learning to love one another and love ourselves—to learn to really listen to each other.”

“I’ll do my best to pass this message on,” I tell him.

“I know you will. I have the highest hopes for you.”

Just then more people arrive to visit Sal—a few friends, one also a Holocaust survivor, and two rabbis. The energy in the room shifts to something less intimate and busier, the work of hellos. I stand up, move to the back, and try my best to get out of the way. Robyn steps back to join me. She smiles and says, “Chris, it’s so nice to really meet you. I’ve heard my dad talk about you and your conversations together. But I never got it until just now.” We both have tears in our eyes.

“Thank you, Robyn,” I respond. “It’s wonderful to meet you. Your dad’s talked a lot about you to me. He’s so proud of you and his granddaughters.”

“I’m so glad I saw you two together,” she continues. “You mean so much to him. I’ve never seen him respond to someone like that. You listened to him so deeply. You two have a real connection.”
“I feel so blessed to have met Sal. Your father has been a powerful force in my life. It means a lot to me to share this moment with you and your family. Thank you for being so open to my being here.”

“Thank you for being here. You should have seen Dad’s face when we told him you were coming.”

“Wow,” is all I can say in response as the moment catches me off guard. Tears that have been welling up and teetering all this time fall freely. I’m left looking down in silence.

When I look up I can see Sal’s a bit agitated with all the people in the room. Sandy gives me a look that I can’t quite make out, a half smile and a sigh, which I interpret as meaning that my presence is still welcome. Everyone in the room is talking to one another at once and the volume is getting louder. I see Sandy lean in to Sal as he says, “Tell everyone to leave.”

Sandy announces confidently and calmly: “Okay everyone, thank you for coming. Sal is tired and needs some rest.” We all file out of the room. I say goodbye to the people I’ve just met and take a moment to reflect in the hallway. Almost immediately the door to Sal’s room opens and Sandy peeks out and sees me. “Oh, good, Chris, you’re still here,” she says in a chipper voice. “Sal wanted the others to leave so he could talk more with you,” she adds with her infectious laughter. I smile. I stick around for the next two hours talking with Sal, Sandy, Robyn, and Andrew, until it’s time for some of Sal’s treatments.

Two days later, I visit again, this time with Carolyn Ellis, but, just minutes before we arrive, Sal is moved to the Intensive Care Unit. We can’t see him, so we stick around and talk with Sandy, family, and friends in the waiting room. After Sandy and Robyn are
called back into the ICU, we say goodbye to Sal and Sandy’s friends. Later that evening, I get a call from a family friend telling me that Sal waited for his brother to arrive before he died.\footnote{I refrain from using the more metaphorical, “passed away,” because Sal didn’t like things “softened.” I get the sense that he would want me to be as direct as I could here.}

Two days later, I attend Sal’s funeral, held graveside at Gan Shalom Cemetery in Lutz, Florida. More than a hundred family, friends, and synagogue and community members are in attendance. It is a traditional, conservative Jewish funeral. We all have a hand filling in the grave, a ritual I experience as profound. One of the two rabbis comments that Sal considered himself a conservative Jew but that he was his own kind of conservative, that he had a unique moral compass. Sal is laid to rest between two old oaks on a hot windy day. A number of Sal’s family and friends come up to me and say how glad they are that I have so many hours of Sal’s stories audio recorded and that they look forward to my writing about him.

One year later, at 10 a.m. on Sunday March 17, 2013, I am once again at Sal’s gravesite, this time at the unveiling of his headstone (see Figure 1.2). It is a beautiful and somber event. The sky is half filled with high clouds which form a checkerboard pattern above. I am honored to be in attendance. Sandy and I embrace when we see each other. She has cut her hair and looks tired, although, as always, she seems to hold herself and the family together with strength and grace. I talk briefly with Sal’s daughter and granddaughters. I tell them the good news, that I’ve accepted a position as an Assistant Professor, and we talk about the next steps of my journey and the defense of my dissertation. I tell Sandy once again what a profound impact she and Sal have had on me and about plans to continue to write about Sal. She smiles. Both a part of and apart from...
the scene, I hang back after the ceremony and wait for the family to leave, feeling like an ethnographer (someone there to take the information down for a purpose other than familial grieving, though I have my own sense of loss as well). Tears fall as I place two small rocks on the top of Sal’s headstone, next to the dozen or so others left by the family. Like this story, they are small, material tokens and reminders of our presence, of our memories and love for Sal, and of the relational sense that he, even in death, is not alone. He and his story live on through the lives and stories of those who have had the profound experience of knowing him. I am again reminded of the words of Bruce Springsteen (2007):

Now your death is upon us, and we’ll return your ashes to the earth.

I know you’ll take comfort in knowing you’ve been roundly blessed and cursed.

But love is a power greater than death, just like the songs and stories told.

And when she built you brother, she broke the mold.
Commitment to sharing authority is a beginning, not a destination. (Frisch, 2003, p. 198, also cited by High [2009] and Sheftel & Zembrzycki, [2010])

The goal of this chapter is to share, in an intimate way, some of the “meat” of the process of “digging” through the “big kettle of soup” of my time with Sal. I wish for the moments shared here and the choices I made to speak for themselves (and I mean this in a loaded way), and I hope for others to make sense of and judge them as they see fit. I choose to maximize the space I give to Sal and Sandy’s voices and our relationship. Ironically though, through the process of talking with Sal and Sandy and now “digging” through our conversations, it becomes ever clearer how much of this story is necessarily omitted and remains silent and untold: for Sal, there are mysteries he never found out about in his own life; for Sandy, as well as she knew and loved Sal, parts of his life remain a question mark; and for me, as an ethnographer (Crawford, 1996), I feel a near-crippling sense of not being able to do justice, in this or any representation, to the man I knew and came to love. To deal with this dilemma, in Robert Coles’ (1989) words, I “err on the side of each person’s particularity” (p. 27) 14, attempting to show the compassionate “spirit” of this work. Instead of working from a priori theory or traditional ways of “researching” survivors, inspired by Greenspan (2010), I respond to Sal and Sandy as unique individuals in order to hear more of what it is they have to tell. In

14 I cite Coles’ words with deep gratitude to Arthur Bochner, who assigned this book in his Narrative Theory doctoral seminar and whose work shows the value of personal stories.
struggling to represent Sal meaningfully, I have crafted 200 pages of verbatim dialogue from our conversations, a tiny fraction of which is included here.

The core of my ethic is inspired by Sal, Ellis and Rawicki (2012), and Greenspan and Agi’s (2010) “moral of the story\(^{15}\)” (p. 211), that engaging compassionately with survivors of mass atrocities is a significant scholarly justification, one that tests the limits of traditional oral history and responds to the vastness, complexity, and ethics inherent in coming to terms with and sharing any life. This piece, therefore, is a concrete attempt to encourage myself and others to listen with more heart and spirit to the individual paradoxes of life and death (see Greenspan, 2010, p. 41-73), love and loss, lost and found that emerge from individual life histories, especially the life histories of Holocaust survivors at the end of life. Beyond that, I hope this chapter shows what to me was the wisdom shared through talking with a friend who had a lifetime of experience remembering and telling. I hope this work stands as a tribute to my friend Sal and that Sandy and his family find intimate resonance in it and see it as sharing a side of him that few knew.

My feeling is that if more people knew this side of Sal and saw this kind of wisdom, the world might be a different place. Expanding this thought one frame larger, if we knew these sides of others, perhaps the planet and our social and relational structures would be different—more peaceful, humane, compassionate, vulnerable, and open to the lives and experiences of everyone. My feeling and this dissertation as a whole are dedicated to “really listening” to individuals and to what is most important in our lives, even in the face of the Holocaust and the ongoing atrocities in the world (some of which

\(^{15}\) Here I refer to Greenspan’s humane justification to listen to survivors for the purpose of listening and Agi’s understanding of compassion.
are quiet, mundane, everyday atrocities like those of corporate domination of the globe). In a time when we are blinded by the brightness of our era, deaf because of all the noise, and overwhelmed by torrents of distractions, perhaps “simply” listening to each other is a radical act, one with the potential to wake us up to the humanity at stake in our everyday lives and conversations, as well as to the reality that, in the end, we all face what Sal faced.

Perhaps if we listen more deeply and told our stories more richly we would see better what is most important and that, in the largest scheme of things, we are all on the same boat (Earth) and meet the same fate. Maybe then we would be able to focus on passing down what is most important in life while looking ahead to see what ought to matter in the future. To me, this is what communication is all about and this is what Sal and I mean when we say “appropriation:” a symbolic lineage, a passing from one generation to the next. This is the heart of human storytelling—why I am telling this story right now, why, at a basic level, you are reading it, and what and why any story—from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (which predates Homer’s Odyssey by 1500 years, see Fisher, 1984) to Bruce Springsteen’s (2012) most recent album *Wrecking Ball*—attempts to share: life is fullest with love and relationships; death faces us all; we must become conscious of the challenges we as individuals as societies face; a higher consciousness is attained through accepting the reality of life and death. In Fisher’s (1984) words, “We learn these truths by dwelling in the characters in the story [and the characters we meet in our lives] . . . by comparing the truths [in the story] to the truths we know to be true from our own lives” (p. 17).
When talking with Sal and Sandy, this was always my goal—to, as Art Bochner (personal communication, November 11, 2012) described this project, see what we could get into, not what I could get out of our interactions. This is a goal I believe more researchers of human beings could humanely employ, to be more interested in what can be generated and opened up between people, instead of being interested in meeting contemporary, disciplinary styles and strictures of how research ought to be done and what we are supposed to get out of, and take from, our subjects. I hope you read this story with a similar spirit and that this story resonates with you in this way, a way in which you try to read yourself into Sal and Sandy’s lives, into my life, and into this particular, compassionate telling.

Figure 1.3 Sal and Sandy Wainberg on Vacation in Southeast Asia, 2008
Chapter Five:

“I Still Want to Kill the Bastards,” Manuel Laughs:

Ethnographic Identification with a Holocaust Survivor

Between Compassion and Rage: Identification and Division

“My psychologist used to say, ‘Manuel, your ability to intellectualize is your best
defense mechanism.’”

Holocaust survivor and retired psychologist Manuel Goldberg is the authority of
this quote. Of course, he’s quoting his former psychologist. I choose to open this chapter
with his words and do so to illustrate my motive (Burke, 1945, 1950) in practicing
ethnography—to compassionately see Manuel and those I work with as experiential
authorities, collaborators rich with insight and wisdom into their own and the collective
human experience. Indoctrinated\textsuperscript{16} as scholars, we are taught to work from recognized
intellectual authorities—to quote at the outset of our papers the profound words of
Foucault or Burke, Conquergood or Geertz, and not often from everyday folks like me
and those who share their time with me. Thankfully, I found my way into a doctoral
program, and a National Communication Association division, that encourage me and
others to tell stories and focus on particularities (Bochner, 2001, 2011, 2012; Berry,

\textsuperscript{16} I use this word because it’s the word Manuel and Rachel use poignantly in our dialogue together. Our
interaction can be found on page 123.
The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate, expand, and interrogate the possibilities and limitations of applying a compassionate, identification-oriented approach to ethnographic interviewing (Burke, 1950; Conquergood, 2002; Patti, forthcoming; Ellis & Rawicki, forthcoming). Simultaneously, I show the relevance of (com)passionate ethnography to the fields of communication and oral history and submit this work as an act of the public telling of Manuel Goldberg’s experience during and since the Holocaust. I accomplish these goals by storying my three years of ongoing conversational interviews with Mr. Goldberg, attempting to embody Burke’s (1950, p. 19-46) dynamic concept of “identification.” My aim is to practice “a doctrine of consubstantiality,” which, Burke argues, “may be necessary to any way of life” (Burke, 1950, p. 21). Acting together (Stewart, Zediker, & Witteborn, 2004) is a way of life especially needed today, in a violent, divided world where people at all levels of society seem to talk past each “other.” Inspired by Goodall’s (2000) “new ethnography,” this work adds to the chorus of those who see, hear, and employ ethnography as a relational way of life, an interpersonal orientation and lived aesthetic—both in our writing and interactions with others. Burke explains that “a way of life is an acting-together” (Burke, 1950, italics his, p. 21), and my aim is to act together: with a Holocaust survivor and his partner, as well as with readers of this work.

Burke’s boundary-breaking (and making) corpus of writing has influenced generations of scholars outside of rhetoric, where our field most often recognizes his contributions. In particular, his thinking has infused the fieldwork and writing of
ethnographers of communication (Anderson, 2004; Brodkey, 1987; Carbaugh, 1990, 1996; Conquergood, 2002; Geertz, 1973; Geertz & Inglis, 2010; Goodall, 2000; Hymes, 1972; Sefcovic, 1995; Turner, 1988). Connecting rhetorical concepts to the practice of ethnography, however, remains underdeveloped and is ripe for growth (Payne, 2006). Identification is a rhetorical concept that is central to the pragmatic praxis of new ethnography (Goodall, 2000) and other life-as-method approaches to scholarship flourishing in the field of communication.

Yet, identification is more than a simple, positive God-term, and identifying with those with whom we interact ethnographically comes with important ethical risks. Burke (1950) exposes the inherent risks of identification and the “division” (the othering necessitated by identification) that occurs through acts of naming “us” and “them.” Division is the negative, agonistic, possibly deadly consequence of identification.

Criticizing the strategy of Nazi Germany, Burke (1939, 1950) uses a dramatic example in warning of the dangers inherent in the rhetoric of identification: “We know, as a lesson of recent history, how anti-Semitism provided the secularized replica of the Divine Scapegoat in the post-Christian rationale of Hitler’s National Socialist militarism” (Burke, 1950, p. 31-32). Burke’s example reminds me of a literal version of the scapegoat, which I heard about during my first interview with a Holocaust survivor in 2009, a Polish man named Nathan Snyder. Mr. Snyder shared a childhood memory of a local ritual that took place around Christmas and New Year’s in which non-Jewish Poles would make a “goat mask” out of the head of a dead goat. The anti-Semitic Poles would

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17 Our interview for the USF Library’s Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories project: [http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/158/](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/158/). Nathan Snyder tells me this story at fourteen minutes and eighteen seconds into our interview.
elect someone to wear the goat costume and march around town as the “sacrificial Jew,” who was then ritualistically beaten by followers with sticks. Nathan explained that the local Poles enacted this violent ritual due to anger they felt from the inaccurate belief that “the Jews had killed Jesus.”

Identification, Burke (1950) points out, raises the question of its inverse, division. This is a tension I felt intensely while interviewing Manuel Goldberg, a man with whom I identify at deep levels and see as a sane, peaceful, and wise friend. When he tells the story of his father’s murder in Auschwitz and about the murderous rage he still feels, I can—in a translated, peculiar way—identify. I feel his rage is justifiable, and it evokes rage within me.

Over the past three years, our conversations have circled around identification, compassion, and rage as key themes and terms. Using our voices from audio-recorded interviews, I dialogically story these themes, illustrating how they evolved over the course of our conversations. It is a messy, detailed process. After working through stories that exemplify promises and perils of identification and tell Manuel Goldberg’s history, I circle back to the broader conversation of the role of identification in new ethnographic approaches to (the study of) human communication.

**Connecting In-and-Through Conversations**

I connected with French born, long-time American Holocaust survivor Manuel Goldberg and his Jewish-American partner Rachel Rivlin before our official interview for the USF/FHM, which took place on July 29, 2010. During our initial pre-interview, I sensed a kinship with Manuel and Rachel while we sat and talked on the spacious third floor of the atrium of USF’s Sarasota-Manatee campus. Unlike the dozen or so other
Holocaust survivors whom I have interviewed in-depth, Manuel and Rachel felt more collegial, as if I were talking to a fellow graduate student or professor. The deep connections I have formed with other survivors seemed to be based on an intergenerational, grandparent-grandchild dynamic. With Manuel and Rachel, however, it was our ability to identify (Burke, 1950) in other ways, I believe, that led to our unique relationship—one formed through conversation (Shotter, 1993).

After three years of processing and meditating on our conversations, I’m left pondering a classic and contemporary dichotomy—the tension between violence and peace, rage and compassion, division and identification. I seek to dive into these “lived antitheses” (Greenspan, 2010) of Manuel’s, Rachel’s, and my conversations in order to avoid common pitfalls of working with Holocaust survivors18. Interviewing Manuel and Rachel in personal, ongoing ways helps me to avoid the common consequences of traditional, testimony-oriented, “neutral,” and post-hoc critical interpretations of scholars, which characterizes the vast majority of research on Holocaust survivor interviews (Greenspan, 1998/2010; Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006; Kushner, 2006). Instead, I practice a compassionate, personal ethnographic sensibility (Crafword, 1996) in order to share more of the intricacies of Manuel’s experience and what we together have to tell.

The goal of this work is to widen our notion of consubstantiality (Burke, 1950) as a community of ethnographers, as well as to share historically important complexities of talking with a Holocaust survivor. First, I share key dialogic moments which illustrate the

18 Reflecting on forty years of listening to and studying research on Holocaust survivors, Greenspan concludes that scholars tend to unconsciously only hear the life or death in the stories of survivors, failing to hear the complex antithesis within which survivors live and out of which their stories manifest. Further, Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) argue compelling, supported by the experiences of Holocaust survivors, that most interviews of Holocaust survivors are not, in fact, inter-views. They argue that most interviewers fail to relationally engage with survivors in ways that are meaningful to the survivors interviewed and, as a result, fail to create/elicit meaningful, historically unique interviews/recounting/testimony.
theme of rage/compassion from our USF/FHM interview. Second, I tell a brief historical story of Manuel Goldberg’s family during World War II. Third, I share the story of how Manuel and Rachel met. Fourth, I exemplify key dialogic moments of identification (from our ongoing, audio-recorded interviews). Fifth, I synthesize the risks and rewards of applying Burke’s (1950) notion of identification to new ethnographic (Goodall, 2000) approaches to the study of communication.

With the cultivation of peaceful compassion as the goal of my work with Holocaust survivors, how can I justify my identification with and appreciation of Manuel’s murderous rage?

At the Edge of Rage/Compassion: Key Moments from Our USF/FHM Interview

At thirty-five minutes and forty-six seconds in to our USF/FHM interview, I ask Manuel to tell me about his older brother, Charles, born in Paris, France in 1930, ten years before Manuel, born March 17, 1940. “Since we’re talking about your brother, would you share some more of his experience and some of his stories?”

Manuel gets choked up as I ask the question and pauses to cry for a moment. He breathes in deeply and begins a story about a time when Charles and two cousins were on their way back from a town not far away from where his family was hiding in Normandy. As the group passed by a main road, they heard machine gun fire and saw attacking planes overhead. Charles saw that a German convoy, filled with Belgian prisoners of war, was engulfed in flames. Manuel weeps as he tells the story: “He [Charles] said they [he and his cousins] heard all kinds of screaming, and they could see the bodies burning. There was one body burning: the head came off, and it was a burning, rolling head,

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19 Find our historically archived and publically available interview for this project here: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/177/.
rolling towards them. It just—you know, to this day, he [Charles] cannot stand the smell of a barbeque, because of the burning flesh. He says those visions are still with him.” He cries softly.

After a long pause I respond, “You mentioned that the emotion of talking about these things has started to become more acute as you’ve gotten older.”

“Yep. Mm-hmm.”

“Can you explain? What do you think that’s all about?”

“I don’t know. I find that, as I get older, I’m more and more emotional about everything.” He gives the example from a year-and-a-half earlier, when he picked up his son and daughter-in-law at the airport and they told him she was pregnant. He started crying with joy. (He cries when telling the story.) “I can’t stop the tears from flowing lately,” he laughs and cries at the same time.

Soon after, Manuel tells me a story told to him by his mother’s friend, after the war was over, when he was back in Paris. She was part of the Jewish underground. The Germans caught her and wanted information. She refused to give it, “She said, ‘I knew that if I gave them the information, I was dead. No question about it. They’d have no more use for me. I’m Jewish. I’m in the underground; they’d shoot me right away.’” They put her naked in a freezer for an unknown amount of time, he told me. She later developed lung problems she associated with the torture. “And then, afterwards, they continued interrogating her, and they started ripping out her toenails. And I didn’t believe her. I said, ‘No, they can’t do that.’ So, she took off her shoes and showed me. She had no toenails. I remember being horrified. That’s what it was like.”
Overwhelmed and still trying to take in his brother’s and this story, I ask “What do you do with memories of that kind? I guess we, as a culture, all have to deal with the fact that humans did this to humans. But it’s pretty personal for you and your family. How do you deal with that?”

“Frankly, I’m not sure,” Manuel responds. “Mostly, you try to live your life and do the best you can. Every once in a while, you become very much aware of the rage—and it’s rage, no question about it.” He tells a story about his now-deceased wife Helen, when they were living in Hackettstown, New Jersey (in the Northwest part of the state). She had been working at a newspaper when a local neo-Nazi was arrested for something. Her bosses at the paper wanted her to interview him but she refused: “I remember thinking,” Manuel says. “I’ll interview him, and I hope he tells me that it’s a good thing my father was killed, because I’ll beat the shit out of him.’ And it would have been more than that, you know. I mean, it just feels murderous, the need for revenge. There’s—you don’t forget and you don’t forgive, never.”

I ask him here about the survivors whom he’s interviewed, which he told me about in our pre-interview. While working at the New York Association for New Americans as a vocational counselor, he got to meet Jewish immigrants from all over: “I got to meet some of the older ones who had been in camps: they’d have a number on their arms. And I would always ask them what camp they were in.” He begins crying but continues slowly, “If they’d been in Auschwitz, I would ask them if they knew my father. Never, unfortunately. None of them ever did, because—I mentioned before my father was murdered in Auschwitz.”
I take the opportunity to ask, “Since you brought up your father, could you tell me his story, then, during the Holocaust?”

“The last time I saw him I was probably eighteen, seventeen months old, and that’s why I really have no memory of him, other than what my mother and my brother have told me—and a few pictures. That’s unfortunately about all I can tell you.”

I respond, “The first time we talked, I remember thinking—you said very specifically and powerfully that he was murdered in Auschwitz. One of the things I’ve read in researching Holocaust narratives is that we don’t like to hear—when we study the Holocaust in America—things that go against our notions of morality (Reich, 2006; Weiviorka, 2006). And so, I appreciate that you do say it pointedly. ‘He was murdered.’ You do talk about rage and the need for revenge. I think that’s something that we need to hear about.”

His response strikes a chord in me each time I revisit it (he’s teaching me and anyone willing to really listen) (Patti, forthcoming): “When you take good, innocent men, women, and children and you shove them in gas ovens, it’s murder. When you shoot them for no reason at all, it’s murder. If you go out in the street here and you go up to somebody and shoot him because you don’t like the color of their skin or their nose or their name, it’s murder. And when you do it to six million people, it’s atrocious murder. How could you not have rage?” There is a long pause, and you can hear the quiet rage build in his voice. He takes a deep breath and exhales. “And if people are shocked hearing me say that, then they need to be shocked. They need to hear this. They need to know about man’s,” Manuel is cut off by his sobbing before he finishes his thought, “inhumanity to man. They deprived me of my father and a whole bunch of other
relatives. They horribly damaged my mother: her health—her emotional health. She had already been through a revolution and a war, and then this on top of it.”

“How would you say that it shaped her life? That’s a pretty broad question.”

“I think the most horrible damage it did is that she gave up, and she only lived to provide for her children. She gave up on her own life, and she became a very bitter woman. And this was a woman who was very, very bright, talented, probably with half a chance could have benefited from an excellent education, and made something of herself. She was a very warm, lively person. Even—she only had four years of formal schooling, and yet, she could read Cyrillic, Roman alphabet, and the Hebrew alphabet. She spoke five different languages. Initially, she spoke Ukrainian, Russian, and Yiddish, and then she came to France, she learned French. She came to the United States, she learned English. So she was fluent in five languages, and that takes quite a bit of brains to start with. She read; she loved opera and music. She could have had a wonderful life, given half a chance, and it was ripped away from her.”

Putting a traditionally positive spin on it I add: “Well, thank God she seems to have instilled that in her children, and all of those talents were passed down to the next generation.”

“She did. Yes she did. Uh-huh.” He continues, “We had a lot to make up for. That we turned out as well as we have, all three of us, is, I think, impressive actually. Really, when you stop to think about it, ‘Could I have been much more?’ Yes, I’m sure I could have. But I think I did well under the circumstances.” Manuel’s statement brings back a memory of a friend of his, a friend with whom Manuel happened to share the same therapist. Manuel’s friend often seemed irritated at him for not accomplishing more with
his life and voiced his frustration to their therapist. Manuel’s friend later told him of the conversation and the therapist’s response. The therapist said to Manuel’s friend, “‘look at what he has accomplished under the circumstances.’” Manuel says to me, “I was surprised when my friend told me this. I said, ‘Well, how come the sonofabitch never said that to me?’ We both laugh. Manuel seems to feel very comfortable with me and makes another joke. “Anyway—I just realized, by the way, with the new Supreme Court decision, you won’t have to bleep all my terrible words.”

“Oh, yeah, yeah,” I agree wholeheartedly, not sure of the decision to which he refers but getting his joke nonetheless. I add, “No, this [our USF/FHM interview] is history; that’s all good!”

“Oh, okay. Well, it’s history,” he smiles.

“Yeah, you can say whatever the hell you want. I’ll put it that way.” We both laugh. I follow up: “Through learning about psychology, did that shape your thinking about your experience, would you say?”

Manuel gives me another deep lesson—this time at the heart of the matter and one that resonates with Holocaust survivor Sal Wainberg’s and my “life itself” insight (Patti, forthcoming): “I don’t think so. I think they’re much more from the gut. For one thing, the experience, the impact of the experiences, precedes any brain work.”

“So, any symbolic sense,” I clarify in my own words, “all that comes after the hit of it?”

“Oh, yeah,” he says. Manuel gives me an example: “You know, it’s like—I understand that I may have a ‘filterable Epstein-Barr virus’ that’s causing such and such and blah-blah-blah. The bottom line is, I still got a miserable cold, and it’s miserable—
that kind of thing. So, yeah, I understand why I feel this way. I still want to kill the bastards,” Manuel laughs. “It’s that kind of thing, and very, very real and very, very strong, even though I may be making light of it at the moment.” Manuel captures the essence of what has captured me in our conversations in this moment—compassion and rage in the same utterance, comedy and tragedy in the same line, antitheses of life and death. He jokes and laughs about wanting “to kill the bastard,” yet he is deadly serious, and I believe his intentions. Across a universe of experience, I can identify in my own way with his murderous rage. And we’re both ideologically pacifists. I’ll leave this tension and will return to addressing it at the end. For now, I’d like to take a step back and provide some necessary historical context.

A Brief History of the Goldberg (“Colbert”) Family during World War II

Manuel Goldberg was born in Paris, France on March 17, 1940, born into the Holocaust. His is a case at the symbolic, historical, geographical, and personal edges of stories of Holocaust survivors. His story would not have been told as a Holocaust survivor’s story in the past. It also is one he had not told publically until I interviewed him for the USF/FHM project.

Manuel is a sensitive and sane man, a retired psychologist in-touch with his emotions. He speaks from the heart. His father, Maurice (or Mozcek in Polish) was Polish, but he moved to France to avoid Jewish persecution in Poland and “the terrible anti-Semitism” (in Manuel’s words) Jews faced there. Manuel’s mother, Mania (or Madeleine in French) Bershadski, was Ukrainian and moved to France in 1917, also to escape Jewish persecution after the revolution and pogroms. She and Maurice met, and

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20 Much of Manuel’s history during the Holocaust is left out of this chapter due to spatial limitations.
by 1938 it was too late—too difficult—to leave France, so they were stuck during the war. Maurice’s parents were socially radical atheists, and he continued the traditions with Manuel and his brothers. Madeleine came from an orthodox Jewish family headed by a severe patriarchal father, so she rebelled against her roots and was happy to marry an atheist. In Manuel’s words, “She found no use for religion.” Despite being atheists, the Goldberg’s were very culturally Jewish, a way of life Manuel continues today. His parents spoke Yiddish at home and would speak Polish and Russian when they didn’t want the children to understand. His older half-brother Charles was born to Madeline in 1930. Her first husband died before she remarried. Manuel also has a twin brother, Michel. Madeleine said of the twins, “Whenever you’re together, you’re beating each other up; when I pull you apart, you’re crying for each other.” They had “the typical brother’s love/hate relationship.”

By the time Manuel and Michel began learning language their parents didn’t dare teach them Yiddish because it was too dangerous: “The Germans would have picked us up right away.” French was the only language Manuel heard until they got back to Paris after the war. Manuel’s father joined the army in 1939, when France was attacked by Germany. A short time after France was vanquished, Maurice was discharged. For a while, until the late summer of 1941, the Goldbergs were able to live together as a family. Then, on August 21, 1941, German naval officer Alfons Mosher\(^\text{21}\) was shot and killed at the Barbes-Rochechouart Station on the Paris Metro. History would come to show that the German officer was killed by the famous, then twenty-two year-old French communist Pierre-Felix Georges, code named “Colonel Fabien” (King, 2011). The Nazis

responded with radical aggression to what was seen as a political assassination and demanded French police round up between five and six-thousand Jewish men. Manuel’s father was one of those captured, all of whom were sent to Drancy, a French detention camp. The camp was segregated between Jews and non-Jews. From here Maurice was sent, along with thousands of other Jews, to Auschwitz, where he was murdered.

After his father was taken, Manuel’s mother and older brother knew they needed to leave Paris before it was too late to save the rest of his family. Manuel’s mother’s brother had traveled all around France, until he ended up falling in love with and marrying a Christian woman from Normandy. When his uncle and his wife moved back to Paris, Madeleine and she became friends. The woman said to his mother, “Madeline, you have to get out of here. Here’s an address to go in Normandy. They will take care of you. Take the kids and go, now.” Madeleine packed up a few suitcases and the four of them (Charles, Manuel, Michel, and Madeleine) left: “my mother with one of us in her arms and my older brother with the other. We got on a train, the bus, and whatever else and went to Normandy.” Manuel begins to cry softly as he says, “And these people took care of us. They were Righteous Gentiles, and they saved our lives. It’s very important for people to know about people like that.”

In Normandy, the Goldbergs lived in a very small stone house with no indoor plumbing, a dirt floor, and a fireplace.

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22 Manuel is working to get the name of his Mother’s brother from his older brother. He forgets the name because he was so young at the time.
23 He is also getting her name from his older brother.
24 Manuel is in the process of getting the names of the family that saved his family from his older brother Charles.
25 Manuel has many vivid and happy memories of life in Normandy not included here.
“I can’t remember,” he tells me, “if we actually had to go to the stream for water. We may have had a well, I just don’t remember. I do remember there was an outhouse, and that’s where you went at night. As a matter of fact, the funny part was, for some reason my twin brother and my older brother were afraid of the dark. When it came time to go to the bathroom before we went to bed—here I was, and I was the runt of the family. I was a sickly little runt. My twin brother used to beat me up all the time and, of course, my older brother. Actually, he was like a father figure, because he was the only older male around. So, [when it was time to go to the bathroom before bed] I would take my twin brother by the hand and my older brother by the hand: ‘Come on guys, let’s go. Time to pee.’ I wasn’t afraid of the dark, and they were. And other than that, I was the runt.”

Manuel has mostly good memories of life in Normandy. He recalls that it was apple country, and that the locals didn’t drink wine, they drank cider (“what we in the U.S. would call hard cider”). He recalls one funny memory in particular, a story of a great apple press. He can see the giant wooden barrels which were filled with freshly pressed apple juice. He can see the enormous wooden troughs in which flowed the cloudy golden juice from the presses. “So, we were kids. We would get a straw—a real straw, not the plastic stuff—and we’d stick it into the trough and drink the apple juice. It was delicious. Well, you drink enough apple juice—oh, boy, did we have diarrhea,” he told me. We both laugh hard at the story. Manuel reflects on the positive valence the story has for him in hindsight (Freeman, 2010): “But it was a great memory. For some reason, I never remember the diarrhea. My mother told me about it. I remember enjoying the apple juice.”
“There you go,” I respond with a big smile.

“And also the picture of the giant press and the truss. That was really very happy.”

Manuel remembers his mother preparing dinner in Normandy one afternoon and her sending him down to the stream to collect watercress for the fresh salad. He recalls his mother bringing in one of the rabbits to get slaughtered for dinner. She “bopped it on the head but didn’t hit it hard enough.” He remembers his brothers and his laughter as she chased the rabbit that regained consciousness around the dinner table.

Even at such a young age, Manuel knew to be wary because of the way adults spoke and acted about les Boches (the Germans). Their house was near a main road in a rural town, located about five miles from the D-Day beaches. They were surrounded by “good Normandy peasants: very Catholic, very little education, still in the twelfth century. They didn’t want to believe that we were Jews because we did not have horns. We did not have tails. We looked like normal people. We worked like normal people. When I talk about [the peasants thinking Jews had] horns and tails, I’m talking about literally. They really believed that Jews had horns and tails, ‘cause that’s what they had heard all their lives.” While in Normandy they used the false name Colbert, a very old and respected gentile French name, to help them get by. Manuel doesn’t know how they dealt with paperwork because he was so young at the time. As the war went on they heard near-constant bombing. Manuel told me, “We would dive under the beds and feel the earth shaking, and were scared shitless.”

One afternoon Manuel and his older brother Charles walked home from the main town about a kilometer-and-a-half away. Manuel recalled walking through a field on a
beautiful bright and sunny day. Suddenly, they heard and saw planes diving from overhead. He and his brother were standing near a local farmer when the machine gun fire began. The three saw a lean-to made of a corrugated tin sheet propped up on two sticks about ten meters away in the field. The farmer told them to run and hide under the metal sheet. Charles said no, that they needed to drop where they were. They heard machine gun fire as they hit the ground where they stood. Manuel distinctly remembers looking up and seeing shafts of twinkling, dust filled sunlight pouring through bullet holes in the tin sheet. “That’s how close it was,” he told me. “If they saw something move, they fired. The Americans were at least as bad as the Germans.”

Because the Goldberg (“Colbert”) family lived by a main road near to the beaches where the Normandy landings took place beginning on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), they were one of the first towns to be liberated. They saw seemingly endless convoys and troops pass by their town. Manuel recalls how stunned the local Normandy peasants were to see African American troops. “They had never seen blacks before, and they were scared. I remember seeing these twelve-foot-tall guys—remember, and I was the runt, too, and we were small to begin with. They were all very friendly and smiling all the time, and they, of course, loved little kids. We’d go up, and they wore these fatigues—the old-style fatigue pants with the big patch pockets on the side—and we’d go up and bang on the pockets. They’d go into their pockets and pull out candy bars and Tootsie Rolls or whatever candy they had and give ‘em to us. We were thrilled.”

“Wow,” I say, marveling at his story.

Manuel continues, sharing what has become one of my favorite of his stories: “Anyway,” he adds, “one of the big problems we had was food. We never had enough
food. One day, my twin brother [Michel] finds this big can—it turned out to be a five-gallon can—of something he knew was food. [We] opened it up, and here is this kind of light brown, greasy looking stuff. [We] had no idea what it was because we didn’t read English. So we had no idea what [he says with a thick French accent] ‘peanut butter’ meant. You know, ‘from peanut butter?’” He says again in a thick French accent. I let out a big laugh, and Manuel enjoys that I’m following his story. He continues, “So, we tasted it; it tasted terrible. We tried frying it—didn’t work. Boiling it—didn’t work. You name it, we tried it. Finally, we ended up having to very reluctantly throw out a five-gallon can of peanut butter. It was inedible—to the French taste. Of course, I suppose some Americans would have said pâté is inedible. Anyway.”

I add in joking admiration, “And you also told me that still, to this day, you’re not a fan of peanut butter.”

“Well, I’m very slowly starting to accept—I mean, I love to make a nice Thai peanut sauce, and that’s really delicious and it’s peanut-based. And then, because Rachel loves them, I have started making peanut butter cookies. I find, ‘Hey, they’re not bad. They taste a little bit like peanut butter, but basically they’re not bad.’ So those disappear pretty quickly. But peanut butter and jelly sandwich? Not for me. No, thank you.”

After liberation life continued on as before until Paris was liberated on August 19, 1944. Their Paris landlord had kept their apartment for them and when they returned home they found it destroyed from when the Nazis had ransacked it years before. Torn books still littered the floor. (Miraculously, they found out that Nazis had come looking for them only two weeks after they left for Normandy.) Manuel’s mother and older brother found work while Manuel and Michel began school. Life became relatively
normal until, after getting through all the red tape and paperwork, they came to the U.S. in December of 1948. Manuel was almost nine years old.

The family came across the ocean to the U.S. on the De Grasse, one of the French-line boats. “It was like a fairytale to us. It was, to us, a gorgeous boat—even though it was the oldest and least luxurious one of that line. It was, I think, a nine or ten-day trip, very rough seas, sixty-foot waves, in December. Manuel was the only one who didn’t miss meals because of seasickness: “I was very proud of that, ‘cause I was still the runt, remember.” An orchestra played every evening: “They played ‘La vie en rose’ to death. Then, getting to New York Harbor in the early morning and seeing,” Manuel begins crying as he speaks, “the Statue of Liberty in the fog—very emotional because of everything you’ve heard about it. It really is incredibly emotional, especially there it is in the fog, you know, rising out.”

They arrived to “total bedlam.” They didn’t speak a word of English. Nobody spoke French. They lived with grandparents and an aunt. His mother could communicate fluently in Yiddish. His older brother could communicate in broken Yiddish. Michel and Manuel knew no Yiddish, never having had a chance to learn. That’s when they started learning Yiddish and English at the same time. After a few months they enrolled in public school, in the fourth grade, a grade below where they should have been, because there was one teacher in fourth grade who spoke French. Manuel and Michel’s skills in math far surpassed their peers. While Manuel picked up English easily, Michel had more trouble. One day Michel went up to the teacher and asked (Manuel says this in a thick, French accent): “‘May I have a shit of paper?’ And she said, ‘No, no, no, not like that.’ She corrected him, ‘That’s a sheet of paper.’ Unfortunately, he had trouble with the long
and short E, and made the mistake again, and she wasn’t as kind about it the second time.” They caught up quickly though socializing was difficult at first. They got picked on because they talked funny, being called “frogs” and “Frenchy.” They were young enough that they were able to lose their accents quickly. “There was one English teacher who was very British, Dr. McCloud, and he said to Michel, ‘Michel, I know your French accent is devilish with the young ladies, but you must get rid of it.’ But it was devilish with the young ladies!” We both laugh when he says this. Manuel went to City College in New York, where he was part of a small group of French-speaking students. He kept up his French culture, in particular his love of baking and bread. This was and still is important to him and his family and he didn’t want to lose it. “I really have three different cultures. I’m French, I’m Jewish, and I’m American.” Manuel eventually became a psychologist, first working as an occupational therapist and then a family therapist before retiring in Osprey, Florida with his partner Rachel.

“Do You Like Clam Chowder?” A Couple of Meals with Manuel and Rachel

I connected with Manuel and Rachel over the few meals that we’ve had the past few years. I thought it fitting then that they too connected as a couple over a couple of nice meals. In order to identify more with Rachel and Manuel, I wanted to find out how they met. I find their story beautiful and telling and hope it helps readers to identify with the character of their relationship and with them as characters in this story.

Manuel is calm, soft spoken, and he speaks at a good clip. He often makes smart jokes while he tells stories, like the one he opens with in our USF/FHM interview: “And I always point out to friends, when else would a French Jew be born on St. Paddy’s Day? That’s one of the lovely ironies of life.” He and Rachel have what I consider a feminist-
oriented relationship. I’ve said this a few times to them, and they both seem to agree and enjoy the label.

He and Rachel met on August 6, 2002. Previously, Manuel was happily married to a woman named Helen Albert. Helen died, which, in addition to a hurricane hitting his house, caused Manuel to move from the eastern shore of Virginia to Cape Cod, where he and Helen had planned to retire. Not interested in meeting anyone new, Manuel received a concerned phone call from a cousin on his wife’s side of the family: “‘Hey Manuel, want to meet a nice Jewish girl?’ And I said, ‘sure.’” Manuel looks to Rachel, “Well, you tell the other side of that.”

“Manuel’s cousin by marriage was married to my friend,” Rachel picks up.

“You should explain,” Manuel clarifies, “Nina is a Russian Jew who learned to be tough as nails, brash as hell, and never to take no for an answer.”

Rachel continues, “So, Nina calls: ‘Rachel, Sal’s cousin has moved to the Cape, and he might like to meet a nice Jewish woman. Will you go out with him?’ And I said, ‘Gee, thanks Nina, but no, thank you. I’ve dated. I’ve had my experiences. Enough.’ You know: ‘No, thanks.’ ‘Rachel, just go out with him! What do you got to lose?’ I said, ‘Well, thank you, Nina. That’s very nice of you but no.’ ‘Rachel, just go out with him!’ Knowing Nina, and she wasn’t gonna give up, I said, Alright, what have I got to lose? I’m gonna go out with him and then call Nina and say, ‘Thank you very much. I went out with him. He was very nice but it wasn’t a match. Okay.’ So, she gave him my number. He called me. We went out to dinner at a Mexican restaurant owned by a friend of mine. We sat. We talked. We ate. Found out we had something in common. And the rest is history.”
With a gleam in his eye Manuel adds, “Actually, when really clinched it was the second date. We were supposed to go out. It was Friday, I think.”

“Mm-hmm,” she confirms, entertaining the long version of the story.

“I had gone clamming on Wednesday or Thursday and gathered some nice big chowder clams. So I called her up and said, ‘Hey, do you like clam chowda?’” He says in a thick New Englander accent. “She said, ‘I’m from Maine, of course I like clam chowda,’” imitating his overly-affected accent. “I said, ‘Well, I’ve been clamming. I’ve got some really nice chowder clams, how ‘bout instead of going out I come over and we make some chowder?’”

“That did it,” I chime in.

Rachel adds, “So we thought we’d make some clam chowder together. ‘Cause I make chowder and he makes chowder.”

“She makes it the wrong way,” he jokes, being cute about it.

“I don’t. No,” she says, deadly serious.

“Also, I smoked some Bluefish. Have you ever had smoked Bluefish? It’s wonderful.”

“Really good,” she confirms.

“So I brought some of that over. And of course I bring a nice bread. I’m a baker.”

“I came home from work and there he was sitting in front of my house in his car. Got up to the car. He stepped out, opened the trunk, and the backseat was full of food,” she says with a big smile.

“There were only two bags. Anyway.”

I add, “It still sounds like you set a pretty good trap there.”
“Mm-hmm,” Rachel expresses, moving higher in pitch as she does so.

“You knew what you were doing when you brought all that over,” I say.

“My mother always said some guy would catch me with a steak,” Rachel says.

“Instead I used clam chowder.”

“Clam chowder and smoked Bluefish,” she makes clear.

“Smoked Bluefish and fresh bread!” adds Manuel. “And that worked very well.

And the first time you came over, it was going to be just for the day—”

“I drove down to the Cape to Manuel’s house.”

“That time I made a very nice dinner with cold lobster with two different types of fresh-made mayonnaise. And we were going to have scallops.”

“By the time we finished lunch, it was too much,” she says. “It was about ten-o’clock, and I said, ‘Oh, my god. I can’t face driving.’”

“So I suggest she stay over. And I pointed out that she could save me a lot of laundry by, instead of using the guest bedroom, sharing my bed.”

“There you go,” I say, rooting for Manuel. “Seems like a logical argument to me.”

“I ended up with a lot of laundry to do though,” he admits.

“I said, ‘No, I’ll use the guestroom,’” she says proudly.

“Awww, okay,” I say. She laughs. I add, “As a lawyer, she’s heard some good arguments in her day, I guess.”

“Yeah, well—I think so,” she says. We both laugh. “And since then we just kept going.” The two bought a place in Sarasota, Florida in 2003 and have been there ever since.
Identification and Our Conversations

We need never deny the presence of strife, enmity, factions, as a characteristic motive of rhetorical expression. We need not close our eyes to their almost tyrannous ubiquity in human relations; we can be on the alert always to see how such temptations to strife are implicit in the institutions that condition human relationships; yet we can at the same time always look beyond this order, to the principle of identification in general, a terministic choice justified by the facts that the identifications in the order of love are also characteristics of rhetorical expression. (Burke, 1950, p. 20)

In this section of conversational stories, I collapse our two dim sum dinner interviews into a theme that shows and tells key moments of identification—the terministic choices we make to share, to love, and to play, even as we speak of rage, hatred, anger. On one occasion, probably my favorite moment with Manuel and Rachel, we even collaborate on a plot to burn down a prominently shown confederate flag displayed locally in Tampa. Following this section, I unpack the lessons I take from this work.

Manuel’s partner, Rachel Rivlin, is a retired corporate insurance lawyer. She is highly intelligent, well-read and well-spoken, and a little intimidating at first—probably because she speaks sharply, like a lawyer. She is a contrast Manuel’s playfulness, his “bad” (in his words) sense of humor, and his calm and therapeutic presence. At our first

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26 This theme contains over thirty pages of verbatim, dialogic examples of identification from our conversations. For reasons of space, I include only a few telling examples.
lunch interview on July 8, 2010 (at the Gold Dynasty Chinese restaurant in Sarasota, Florida, near where Manuel and Rachel live and about an hour-and-a-half south of where I live) Rachel opens up the conversation: “Are you gonna ask us questions?”

I respond, “Ah, maybe? Or we can just talk about dim sum, too.” Rachel laughs.

“That’s the other nice thing about this research. I think the best stuff tends to come out of random conversations.”

Manuel chimes in, agreeing with my method, “Plus you get a lot of incidental information that can be very useful.”

“Exactly,” I say.

Rachel asks, “All that’s gonna be relevant?” She lets out a big laugh.

“Oh yeah—it’s all relevant.” I tell her. “It’s all the seemingly extraneous stuff that’s the most interesting to me.”

Rachel orders for us: shrimp dumplings, pan-fried dumplings, steamed pork buns, crispy sesame balls, cold peppery jellyfish, pea tendrils—the works. We drink too much good, hot Oolong tea and chat away. A shrimp dumpling slips out of Rachel’s chopsticks:

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she feigns an apology.

I add, “That happened last time, didn’t she—”

“She got it all over my shirt,” Manuel confirms.

“You got me again,” Manuel jokes. “At least you’re consistent.”

“May I slop you—I mean serve you?” She asks Manuel, portioning him some slippery, savory jelly fish.

27 Manuel’s statement recalls VanMaanen’s (1988) classic insight: “Accident and happenstance shapes fieldworkers’ studies as much as planning or foresight” (p. 2).
“You already did the damage,” he jokes, rubbing it in once more.

We talk about our favorite stores at which to shop—Costco and Trader Joe’s. I say, “They have, in California, the ‘two-buck Chuck,’ the Charles Shaw wine. So good. Two bucks!”

Rachel adds, “They call it ‘two-buck Chuck’ or ‘duke juice.’”

The conversation continues and we identify with our love of travel, specifically our love of Asia and trips there. Rachel went to China in 1985. We’ve all been to Japan and Cambodia. Manuel and Rachel have been all over Asia. Suddenly Manuel chokes violently. “Are you okay?” asks Rachel.

Manuel replies calmly, “I aspirated. I’m okay.”

“You certainly did,” she responds with concern.

“I’m okay,” he reassures her and me. “I had an ablation done on my esophagus, and it takes a few weeks to get over. I’m not there yet. So, eating is difficult.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I say.

“It was what—two weeks ago?” he asks Rachel.

“Yeah. He’s still working on it, getting better.”

Our conversation turns back to Cambodia. We talk about the chaos and the peace there, which exist at the same time, and the post-genocide rebuilding still ongoing. I tell them my trip to Cambodia is one of the reasons I became interesting in working with survivors of genocide.

Rachel says, “When the killing was going on [in Cambodia], only, was it, three doctors in the whole country were left.”

“Survived, yeah,” Manuel confirms.
“Mm-hmm, yeah,” I nod.

“And one lawyer,” she adds.

Manuel repeats, “Three doctors and one lawyer.”

“Yeah,” I say, “‘cause that was the first thing they did is, anyone—”

Manuel helps me, “Any intellectual.”

“Any intellectual,” I say.


I add my take, “But the problem is you can’t go in reverse in society. You can’t get back to pre-industrial once you’re already in the—”

Manuel picks up my thought, “No. I mean, they tried it, Mao tried it. Doesn’t work.”

Rachel repeats, “That they killed all but three doctors in the country, one lawyer in the whole country—How do you do that?”

I add, “Then you see the people today and they’re peaceful and happy, and they’re living in what to an American seems like abject poverty.”

“Oh,” Manuel says.

“But on average they seem so much happier than Americans,” I say, basing my opinion on my one-month research trip to Cambodia in 2006.

Manuel relates what he has seen in Southeast Asia to his experience during the Holocaust: “Again, what struck us in Vietnam was that—the official line, I’m sure it’s just the official line was, ‘We like the American people. We don’t blame the American people. We blame your past government.’ You know—that’s kind of a fine point, which I’ve never been able to develop towards the Germans, for instance—although, I’ve had
some good friends who were German. As far as the German people as a whole—I don’t want to visit Germany. Even though there are certain parts of Germany I’d love to see. I’m very much aware of the heights of German culture, etcetera. It’s just too much of a rage.”

“Yeah,” I say in support.

“Yeah,” Rachel says.

I add, “I think that’s important. It’s important to feel some of that. And we tend to not be allowed to express rage like that. It’s always this kind of forgive-and-forget philosophy.”

Manuel goes into a story, “I remember on my first trip back to France, which was in 1962.”

Remembering this story from our previous interviews I ask, “Is that when you were 22? Is that the one you’re talking about?”

“Yep,” he responds.

“Oh, great—that happens to be one of the questions I wanted to ask.”

“Uh-huh,” he acknowledges, continuing his story, “I happened to meet with somebody from the United Stated who was a girlfriend of my sister-in-law. We were just walking around in France, and a bunch of German tourists came walking up and down the sidewalk, taking up the whole damn sidewalk, talking loudly. All the sudden I just looked at her and said, ‘I gotta get outa here.’ I just started walking away real fast. I just feel rage.” He brings the feeling of rage from the past to the present in the tone of his voice.
I tell him a story of my own, “That reminds me of Salomon Wainberg, he’s about 75, and he was talking about his first time back to Poland. He was married to his wife at that point for ten years, and they’d never talked about his experience. He’s a pretty stoic guy to begin with. Now he’s a softy compared to how he was when he was younger. They were flying on the plane. He just reverted back to childhood and thought they [the Polish government] were gonna enroll him in the army as soon as he set foot off the plane. All that anxiety just came right back to him.”

“Yep,” Manuel identifies.

I ask, “What do you think first got you interested in psychology, when you were in school?” I ask.

He responds, “You asked me that last time.”

“Yeah,” I laugh.

“And I still don’t know, frankly. Obviously, I guess I wanted to know how people tick.”

We talk about his experience in grad school in New York. He says, “A good Jewish boy has to be pre-med. I realized I was not cut out to sit down and memorize big volumes.”

Rachel adds, “And I should have been a physician.”

Manuel says, “I should have become a pastry chef.”

This leads us to talk about our passions for creating and for art as a mode of self-expression. Rachel says to me: “You do music; I do jewelry; he does bread. It’s the other side of the brain.”
I say, “Art comes from the unconscious a lot of times. There’s a lot of material in there.”

Manuel jokes, “You’re not gonna go Jungian on us!”

“Oh, well I am a little bit of a Jungian (1916/2002). I got my start in rhetorical criticism, and there were some psychological rhetorical critics that use his work (Rushing & Frentz, 1995). Not in any—it just gives a different perspective. But I’m a big fan of his work.”

“But of whom?” asks Rachel.

“Jung,” Manuel says.

“Okay,” she says.

I add, “And he works with symbols. He’s a linguist of sorts, you know. He works with archetypal images. And storytelling—you know the Oroboros is one of his main archetypes. The snake, serpent eating its own tail—“

“Right,” Manuel says.

“That’s kind of human culture, this kind of cycling of that [snake eating its tale]. Storytelling is always a recycling of these same themes. That’s kind of what connects the individual to the whole history of what it is to be human (Campbell, 1981; Jung, 1916/2002). That’s where I like his stuff. And it’s funky. I like it for those reasons too. Did you say, ‘Don’t go into all that Jungian stuff?’”

“Yeah, I did,” he laughs. “I have trouble accepting it.”

“I use it metaphorically. I’m not thinking of it in a scientific way,” I specify.

“Actually, I’m fairly eclectic,” Manuel explains. “I use whichever theory gives me the most appropriate construct for the problems I’m dealing with. And it’s primarily
based on ego psychology. And I like working with Freudian concepts. But I also see how
you can explain Freudian concepts in a very behavioral manner, or really reinforcement.
Every time you do a ‘uh-huh’ you’re reinforcing. And if you pick up on one phrase
you’re reinforcing that whole area of thought.”

“Mm-hmm,” I reinforce.

“If you don’t give any response, well that’s no reinforcement. Then you’re forced
to move on to something else, in a different direction,” he says.

Here I ask Manuel to take me through his understanding of Freudian concepts—
the Id, Ego, and Superego, which he happily obliges. After this conversation I say, “I find
you two fascinating. And I’ve already talked to my professor, Dr. Ellis, and said I hope
that we can continue to talk together. I already know at this point that you two could be a
huge part of my dissertation.”

“Right,” Manuel says.

“You offer a perspective I haven’t seen,” I tell them.

“Really?” Rachel asks.

I explain, “I’ve seen some pretty quintessential survivor experiences, survivor
stories. And you two just shed a whole different light on that, which is so important. And
I love the fact that you [Manuel] are an atheist—”

“And I’m an agnostic,” Rachel exclaims.

“Yeah! That we get to talk about Freud and Jung and all that stuff. I hope that you
enjoy it as well ‘cause you could play a huge part—”

“Yeah,” he interrupts, “I enjoy our talks ‘cause they are stimulating.”
Rachel, like a smart lawyer, pushes me to explain more. She turns the interview back on me, forcing me to deeply meta-reflect for them. “But how are we different from some of the other survivors you’ve spoken to?”

“Well the—I’ve been working for the museum and those tend to be kind of two time conversations. We do the pre-interview, and then we do the main interview. I don’t know, maybe it’s an intellectual bias, because immediately we can go to those intellectual and cultural levels too. You’re different ‘cause, you’re, to me—I talked to Dr. Ellis about this. Dr. Ellis and her husband Dr. Bochner, they’re both in my department, and they’re getting up there, they’re in their 60s, but they’re still very young, and live young and think young—probably because they’re surrounded by college students all the time. Talking to you reminds me of talking to them. We can talk about culture and art. We can talk about food, you know, and Cambodia and all that stuff. So, being able to identify on that level is different. And I guess how I’ve identified mostly with the survivors I’ve worked with, it’s been two different themes: I get along very well with almost every survivor I’ve talked with. They are interested to talk with me. They tell me, ‘Oh, you’re good at listening.’ And I think I have a nice face—”

“Yeah,” Manuel agrees.

I continue my honest and open reflection, “People respond to that. I don’t know? I don’t look like a mean guy or anything like that.” Rachel snickers a little at my comment. “So, I get two responses in identifying: one is the grandchild thing. They see me as their grandchild and they’re happy that I’m interested in their stories. And the other connection that I’ve made: when people get into their 80s, they don’t often get as much social interaction or intimate attention.” Manuel is nodding and agreeing here. “So that’s the
other thing.” I continue, “With you two it feels more collegial, or more colleague-oriented. I feel like I’m talking to a professor. I haven’t had that experience.”

“Interesting,” Rachel says in a pleased voice.

“If that makes sense,” I tell them.

“Sure,” Manuel says.

“Mm-hmm, yeah,” agrees Rachel.

Manuel adds, “I’m sure it also relates to that we’re both fairly intellectually alert.”

I laugh, “Yes, definitely.”

He continues, “Of course, in my case, never having grown up.” Rachel laughs at his admission.

“Yeah, yeah—I like that,” I say. “The other thing is the cancer stuff that we identify with and the therapy stuff. There’s so much there.”

“There’s a common bond there,” Manuel agrees.

“I’ve never talked to someone that says, ‘I’m an atheist.’ And I’m not assuming that’s related to the Holocaust in any way,” I tell him.

“Not directly,” he says, “because I grew up in an atheist house.”

Rachel says, “So I think you would have been anyways. But—”

“But the Holocaust certainly confirmed it,” he says.

Rachel adds, “Yes. For me, I grew up very different.”

“Yeah, you were conservative,” he says.

“I grew up in a conservative Jewish house. Orthodox conservative,” she explains.

Manuel comes back, “That’s major indoctrination.”
“Well, it wasn’t so much indoctrination—I mean, it was just, you know, something that was nice to do.”

Manuel insists, “It is. Well, we don’t think about it as indoctrination, but it is.”

I interrupt, “That comment right there!”

“Excuse me,” Manuel jokingly apologizes.

“Yes,” Rachel says, understanding what I’m drawn to.

I explain, “I love your ability to have meta-conversation. A conversation about—to call it indoctrination is, I totally agree with you, and I totally know the way that you’re using it. Everything is indoctrination.”

“Yeah, exactly—yeah,” Manuel says.

Rachel now agrees, “Yes. It was indoctrination. But it was a way of life.”

“Yes, well of course,” Manuel says.


Rachel synthesizes it for us: “That was just what we did. But it is indoctrination. I mean, we just indoctrinated you in dim sum.”

I laugh, “uh-huh. Oh, yeah!”

She adds, “It’s indoctrination!”

This sparks me to look ahead and I say, “I’d love it if you two would like to come to my dissertation defense.”

Manuel replies, “I’d love to.”

“That would be awesome. Now that I have the proposal done I understand better what I’m asking. The big question is, you know, since the beginning of time people have
been storytelling. Why do we tell our stories? Why do we gather around campfires and tell stories?”

“You sound like a sociologist,” he jokes.

“Yeah, I am,” I say. “Well, Carolyn is a sociologist, so that’s why. Instead of looking at philosophers or theorists or artists that answer these big existential questions, ‘What does it mean to have a meaningful, compassionate life in the face of inherent suffering?’ That’s kind of the big problem of human life. ‘Cause we all die. And we all face some pretty hard things, especially people who have been through something like the Holocaust. In the ways each survivor I have talked with has dealt with their memories of the Holocaust, to me survivors seem like some pretty wise folks. And this kind of in-depth, individual interviewing can bring up some interesting responses to the question of: ‘How do we deal with suffering? How do we live compassionately, meaningfully, when we know that suffering is inherent?’”

Rachel jumps in and jokes, “You kill off the sssss.” She doesn’t say a word, just makes an ‘sss’ sound. “And then everybody else is nice!”

“There may be a few [to kill], but—” Manuel plays along with the ironically violent joke.

“I couldn’t resist,” she says.

This sparks a story for Manuel: “Drive up [interstate freeway] 75,” he tells me.

“Just somewhere north of I-4 is this huge Confederate flag.”

“Yep,” I say, knowing exactly what he’s talking about. Tampa boasts one of the largest Confederate flags still flown in the U.S.

“You know it?” Manuel asks.
“Yeah, it causes some rage in me every time I see it.”

Manuel says, “One of my good friends and I have fantasized about doing a midnight commando raid.”

Laughing I admit, “My brother and I have talked about the same thing!”

“Well, I’m not surprised,” he smiles.

Rachel suggests, “Maybe the four of you could get together into it.”

“That would make a funny news highlight,” I say.

“Oh, yeah,” Rachel laughs.

“Yep,” says Manuel.

I role-play a newscast, “‘Chris Patti and Manuel Goldberg were arrested today.’”

They laugh.

Manuel joins in, “‘Along with their other peace-making sidekicks.’”

I get more specific, “‘Retired psychologist and doctoral student.’”

Manuel plays right along without missing a beat, “‘As he was arrested, Manuel Goldberg tried to defend himself with a stale French bread’” (see Figure 2.1 and 2.2 below). Rachel and I are hysterical.

Our discussion takes off and we start talking about memories from grade school.

Rachel mentions that certain formative memories shape us, which spurs me to ask one of my impossible questions: “What can we even know about ourselves today? That’s a big question.”
Figure 2.1 Manuel’s Bread

Figure 2.2 Manuel’s Bread II
Manuel interprets my ambiguous question in his own way: “The other thing, kind of related as you were just saying, is that these things often happen when we’re at a very sensitive stage. You know, I mean, in my case I was probably about fourteen. So, you know, you’re still kind of forming, exploring adulthood and so on. So, your ego is not far from fully formed, and you’re fragile.”

I admit, “I kind of still feel like I’m in that ego formation stage. And I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that I was fourteen when my dad passed away—”

“Mm-hmm,” Manuel acknowledges.

“You know—that’s when you’re supposed to learn how to be a man.”

“Right,” Manuel agrees.

“And I actually started going to a therapist at USF. I had never done that before. But I want to kind of move to the next stage. I want to get—you know things are going so great professionally. I just kind of feel stuck. I want to move to the next stage. So, that’s why I started going. She’s helped me to realize that I’ve talked about my father’s death a lot. I’ve written about it. I published a book chapter that was about it. So, I felt like, ‘Oh, I’ve sort of dealt with that.’ She’s helped me to realize—”

“That you haven’t,” Manuel knows where I’m going.

“That’s very formative,” I say. “It just blew me away to think, ‘Oh, wow, I’m still, you know—no wonder I have trouble with regular managerial things you’re supposed to learn between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.’ Those are things that I still struggle with.”

“Do you process that the rest of your life?” asks Rachel.

“I think so,” I say.
“You may understand it,” she says.

“But it’s still an issue,” finishes Manuel.

Rachel adds, “It’s still an issue and you act a certain way.”

I continue, “I think to people who are intellectually oriented, there’s a point where—there’s only so much that you can intellectualize. And I’ve used that as a big defense mechanism.”

“Mm-hmm,” Manuel nods—understanding just what I mean.

“You know,” I say. “I built up all these terms and ways of thinking about things in order to protect myself from some of the more raw stuff.”

This sparks a memory for Manuel, “Yeah. I was talking to this very close friend of mine. This was shortly after I was dealing with my first experience with cancer. And he said, ‘Manuel, you’re intellectualizing it a lot.’ And I said, ‘Isn’t that my best defense?’” We both laugh. He adds, “Which it was! And at the time I needed it! That’s why they’re called defense mechanisms. They help protect the ego, which is in a very fragile state being severely impacted by whatever. In this case—in my case—cancer.”

“How do you deal with the idea that, you know, we all recognize that people are fragile. Every one of us is fragile. The strongest person—and this comes again from my dad—the strongest person that I know, the healthiest, he was 39, that person could be taken away in an instant. How do you deal with knowing that and still living in the present, living, finding meaning and not just worrying about the problems that do and will and can happen?”

Rachel adds, “And worrying that maybe it will happen to somebody else that’s close to you.”
“Yeah, and knowing that it eventually will happen, you know, in different ways,” I say.

“Yeah, well, a lot of people, especially in the south, turn to God,” Manuel says.

“That’s a good point,” I say, realizing I’m asking a spiritual question.

“My sarcasm aside,” he says. “You’re quite aware how much I believe in God.”

“Or not,” Rachel clarifies.

“Or not, as the case may be,” Manuel admits.

“But I think that’s a really good answer. The ‘let go and let God’ people who have that capacity for whatever reason. What about for those of us that don’t quite have that ability?”

Rachel says frankly, “I was thinking they turn to drugs.”

Manuel says, “Legal or otherwise.”

“Some people turn to cults,” Rachel says.

“Just somebody with an answer,” I add.

“That’s right. Someone who seems to have an answer.”

“Yeah, answer in quotes,” I say.

Rachel elaborates, “Then I think there are people who really kind of think it through and deal with it in a very realistic manner. Some don’t, and some go off the mental deep end. I mean, I think there are all different kinds of ways to deal with it. The healthy way is you process it.” A few moments later she adds, “This kinda relates to what you’re doing. If somebody doesn’t tell you what’s going on in their head, you can’t precede with an interview.”
I explain, “That’s, to me, why creating, or just having a nice comfortable context and an inter-relational context [is so important]. Most interviews tend to be stale, objective things. I think that gets a certain type of information but more collaborative or engaging interviews, where, you know, I share my own personal life, I think hopefully creates a better context for [sharing deeply personal and often unheard things]. If there’s something that pops into your head you want to share, you can. That’s the idea.”

“The first kind will get you certain information,” Rachel says, following my distinction.

“It’s informational,” Manuel specifies.

Rachel adds, “But you won’t get some of the most interesting stuff.”

Moments later I say, “You’ve talked about feelings of anger. Both of you talked about how in the past sometimes just hearing German spoken raised the hair on necks. You expressed having to deal with some pretty serious anger about losing your childhood—”

“Mm-hmm,” nods Manuel.

I continue, “about the enormity and unknowability of the horror that happened.”

“Right,” he says quietly. “And the murder—the murder of my father.”

“And the murder,” I repeat. “I’ve actually taken your—when you said that—I’ve taken to using, in particular, the word murder. Because you said ‘murder is an act.’ Killing is [something less conscious]—but murder is an act. The word ‘act’ to me is motivated.”

“Mm-hmm,” Rachel nods.
“Exactly,” Manuel says sternly. “It’s the willful taking of another person’s life for no valid reason.”

Since we’d already been talking for over two hours, I say that this is something we can go deeper into in future conversations, which we since have. I say, “You seem to live a very compassionate and meaningful life, despite having a deep understanding of some pretty serious anger—and it’s a righteous anger. It comes from experience.”

The tape stops at two-hours and eighteen minutes but the conversation is left open-ended.

**Acting Together: (New) Consubstantial Ethnography**

The very ‘global’ conditions which call for the greater identification of all men [sic] with one another have at the same time increased the range of human conflict, the incentives to division. It would require sustained rhetorical effort, backed by the imagery of a richly humane and spontaneous poetry, to make us fully sympathize with people in circumstances greatly different from our own.

(Burke, 1950, p. 34)

Manuel’s, Rachel’s, and my abilities to open up to each other and act together—across decades in age and universes of experience—go against the grain of traditional oral history (High, forthcoming) and normative performances of age and gender (Berry, 2007; Butler, 1990). Our dialogic interactions represented here, I argue, are a kind of humane, spontaneous poetry to which Burke points. This chapter speaks to a lived poetry needed today in a divided world, yet even with this as my motive in interacting and
writing, the specters of division and hatred haunt our words. In seemingly paradoxical ways, we speak of both rage and compassion—sometimes in the same utterance: “I still want to kill the Bastards,” Manuel laughs. I identify with and understand—in my own referential way—Manuel’s justifiably murderous rage toward Hitler and the Nazis. Our final story shows these contradictions of compassion and rage in our playing together, as we co-invent the fictional story of us burning down a confederate flag—an act of violence against what we perceive as a local symbol of (a history of) racist violence. Paradoxically, our divisive dialogue comes from our desire to eliminate violence. The trick, for me, is grappling with this tension.

Through the process of writing this piece and working through our conversations, I have come to accept this tension in a way that doesn’t pretend to eliminate or transcend it. Instead, through the practice of working toward a compassionate, consubstantial ethnography, I represent as best and uniquely as I can the wisdom that stems from becoming aware of and reflecting on the tensions between identification, compassion, and rage in our story. In Langer’s (1995) words, “the way out is not to try to jostle the confusion back into an unwarranted clarity, but to find our bearing by using landmarks native to this uncertain terrain” (p. 6). I, therefore, over-identify with Manuel’s story and history and I share it as an act of compassionate storytelling (Patti, forthcoming).

Resonant with new ethnographic approaches to scholarship (Goodall, 2000), I work to tell the conversational specificities of Manuel Goldberg’s history and our time together in order to share the wisdom that comes from entering vulnerably into the lived realities of the experiences of others (Behar, 1996; Boylorn, 2013). Along with leaders in our field, I see this as the moral, or virtue, of storytelling (Bochner, 2001)—the evocative process of
sharing the specificities of our experiences in order to “enter into” and “empathize” (as best we can) with another as a struggling, suffering, complicated, interrelated, often-contradictory, and beautiful human being.

*Consubstantiality* is the word Burke uses to explain identification, meaning: *to be of the same underling matter, or of the same being*. This is the heart of the message of new ethnographic approaches and this chapter—to widen our perspectives as ethnographers and storytellers as much as we can (through sharing detailed, unique, critical, and personal stories) in order to realize—together—the *shared ground* on which we all *literally and figuratively* stand and from which we all come and return. At the deepest and most cosmic levels, we are all in this together. Inspired by Goodall (2000), this work “isn’t afraid to ask the big questions about life, and to . . . [link] those big questions to how I can understand my life in this cosmos, on this blue planet, a bit better” (p. 187). My time identifying with Manuel compels me to address such questions.

Burke’s (1950) solution to avoiding the pitfalls of identification/division, compassion/rage is to get back in touch with our basic humanity and alter “the very scientific ideals of an ‘impersonal’ terminology” (Burke, p. 32) in the first place, which he sees as a main, dehumanizing rational underling Nazi (and any) genocidal logic. He warms, “these [impersonal terminologies] could furtively become devotions to a satanic order of motives” (p. 32). Burke argues, “For it is but a step from treating inanimate nature as mere ‘things’ to treating animals, and then enemy peoples, as mere things. But they are not mere things, they are persons—and in the systematic denial of what one knows in his [sic] heart to be the truth, there is a perverse principle that can generate much anguish” (p. 32). Manuel Goldberg echoes Burke’s and my humanist sentiments
when he tells me that people still need to know about “man’s [sic] inhumanity to man.”

Working and living with the tension I still feel, I seek to personalize this story as best I can and share as much of Manuel’s, Rachel’s, and my personal voices as possible.

New ethnographers too avoid such dehumanizing anguish by risking relational, personal, human/humane, and dramatic (dramatistic) terminologies formed from coming to terms with experience through talking and writing. This is why I choose to over-identify and over-share the voices of Manuel, Rachel, and me, in order to show the consubstantial nature of our time together and to share some of the intricacies of our story that cannot be shown in more traditional, formally analyzed, or scientific ways of interpreting “data.” This is the call of narrative. In Bochner’s (2012) words, “The call of these stories is for engagement within and between, not analysis from without” (p. 161). I share this rhetorically charged, thickly described (Geertz, 1973) ethnographic story (Bamberg, 2006, 2012; Bamberg & Marchman, 2009; Bochner, 2011, 2012), and I ask the reader to over-identify too.

As ethnographers of communication, our abilities to identify ourselves with others through written and embodied conversations adds particular human and humane voices and experience to the cutting edge of our field and beyond (Greenspan, forthcoming; Ellis, forthcoming; High, forthcoming; Patti, forthcoming). Goodall (2000) makes my link between dialogic engagement with Manuel and Rachel (and the dialogic engagement I attempt to make with readers through sharing key moments from our dialogue) and identification explicit:

Ours [new ethnographers’] is an ethic derived from a more evolved dialogic standard. I mean ‘dialogic’ here in the sense that refers to how women and men
can use diverse narrative forms and personal language to share, and to learn from, the full communicative range of human questions, experiences, and meanings. Which is to say that ours is an ethic dedicated to the singular proposition that close textual identification between consenting writers and readers is a very good thing. (italics in original, p. 191)

My work advocates for a deeply interpersonal rhetoric of ethnography (Goodall, 2000; Payne, 2006).

I wish to show that, while respecting and articulating particulars of the universes of experience which separate and connect Manuel, Rachel, and anyone who cares to listen, we can avoid some of the dangers of division through the awareness that we are, also, consubstantial. Joseph Campbell (1981) saw this collective awareness as the central theme of the future mythology of our species. It’s also an “underling” (substantial) foundation of mindfulness, Buddhism, and Eastern philosophy (Batchelor, 1997; Hanson & Mendius, 2009, Codron, 2012)—that is, we can identify as consubstantial with all life, all that eventually falls apart (Chodron, 1997, 2012). I see this as a radically needed motive in the world today and one which new ethnography urges us to practice, a motive of compassion for all life and for ourselves, and a motive to share lives richly and personally through ethnographic storytelling.

This helps me have compassion for the rage Manuel feels (and I feel) toward the Nazis and towards those wishing to do symbolic and material violence generally. I can allow the tension between rage and compassion to exist and use it as motivation for continuing to work with Manuel and other individuals for the purpose of peace. I think this is what listening to another’s story as best we can evokes and necessitates—a
willingness to identify, to relate as best we can with those with whom we have the
privilege of interacting. I hope the reader identifies with the specifics and generalities of
this open-ended story as well.

Open-Ended Conversations

January 30th, 2013: It’s been a few months since I’ve checked in with Manuel, during which time I have presented on my work with another Holocaust survivor and have been applying for professorships. I’ve finally got some good news to share with him. When I call, his voice is calming and therapeutic as usual. I admire his mindful presence as I fumble and excitedly talk too fast: “Hi Manuel! It’s so good to hear your voice.”

“Hi Chris, how are—”

“Good, good,” I say, cutting him off. “How have you been?”

“Great,” he says. “Actually, I’m glad you called. I wanted to let you know that I’ve been talking more about my experience as a kid—with my son and even publically.”

“Oh, that’s great!” I say, accidentally talking over him again because of my enthusiasm for the story he’s telling me. He senses this, never mentions it, and seems to forgive me instantly. “I feel guilty,” I admit. “It’s been so long since I’ve called.”

“A little guilt is good for you,” Manuel softly jokes, reassuring and calming me instantly. He continues, “I must tell you, I’m infamous. A friend of mine called me up a little while ago and said, ‘Manuel, I didn’t know you were a survivor.’ I asked him how he found out and he told me he Googled me,” he exclaims in a happy voice. “It is quite exciting to know that my story is out there for others to hear.”

“You’re Google-able!” I add, laughing excitedly.
“I also must tell you that, since our interview, it’s really opened things up between my son and me. I sent him the DVD, and he watched it. He’s never really been interested in my story before. But now we’re talking about it. I think I’ve softened a bit too as a result of it. I even spoke publically, for the first time, about my experience, when Rachel and I were at a Jewish film festival recently, after a film about Jews in Normandy.”

“Wow!” I add. “That’s amazing. It—and I get this feeling quite a lot with this project but your story brings it back—it is such an honor to work with and to talk with you. This really lets me know that what I am doing is worthwhile—that it has been meaningful to you and your family. I have to ask: Do you feel you’ve been able to process any of the anger that you’ve felt?”

“No,” he says flatly.

Just then I hear Rachel shout from the background, “Yes, he has!” I realize I’ve been on speaker phone the whole time—something Manuel loves to do when I call, as he and Rachel have a collaborative relationship, and Rachel enjoys listening and adding to our conversations. Manuel wants and values her interpretations and insights as well.

“Hi Rachel,” I say.

“Hi Chris.”

“So you say he has processed some of the anger? The way Manuel talks about his rage is so powerful.”

“Oh, I think he has,” she says. “He’s seemed more at peace with his anger. At least to me.”

“Well, maybe, when you put it that way—I guess,” Manuel admits.
I tell them the good news, that I’ve accepted an Assistant Professorship at Appalachian State University starting Fall, 2013. Manuel says, “We’d love to see you and celebrate. Maybe some dim sum in the near future?”

“That would be great!” I say. “How about sometime in the next couple of weeks? Is that too soon?”

“Checking the calendar,” Rachel yells. I can tell she’s far away from the phone because I can barely hear what she’s yelling. “Let’s see.” She moves close to the phone, “How about the 14th? Well, you’ll probably be doing something with your girlfriend since that is Valentine’s Day.”

“Yes, unfortunately that’s one of the few days that won’t work.”

Manuel adds, “Yeah, that’s an important day for you to do something for her—very understandable.”

“How about that weekend?” I ask.

“Let’s see,” Rachel says. “Sunday the 17th?”

“Sure! That works great!”

Manuel jumps in, “There is a new dim sum place we’ve wanted to try—Yummy House.”

“Excellent! I’m in.”

“We do hope that you can bring your girlfriend along. We’d love to meet her.”

“Oh, you’d love her. She’s a beautiful, intelligent young woman. Although, I am certain she is working that day. But I will ask if she can get it off.”

“Well,” Manuel jokes with me, “you know, I do love beautiful, intelligent young women.” Rachel laughs with mock exasperation.
“Ha!” I say, adding, “Well, you know, she does tend to like sensitive, therapeutic men.” He and Rachel laugh.

Figure 2.3 At the Defense with Manuel, Rachel, and Sandy
Chapter Six:

“I Wish You All the Best:”

Affinity, Kinship, and Holocaust Storytelling with Sonia (Sala) Wasserberger

Hear(t)ing Sonia: Writing and Conversation

Sonia (Sala) Wasserberger was born December 12, 1931 in the small city of Goworowo Poland, on the River Narew, about fifteen kilometers away from Warsaw. The name Sonia is a variation on the Greek Sofia, meaning wisdom. Her name at birth, Sala, means peace. Over the course of our conversations, wisdom and peace were two words I would circle back to as anchors.

Sonia speaks with a thick, diverse, mostly-Polish accent, which hints at her complicated history during and since the Shoah and the seven languages she still speaks (M. Wasserberger Checkver, daughter of Sonia, personal communication, April 15, 2013). Adding to the Polish sound of her accent are notes of Russian, Bavarian, Ukrainian, German, Yiddish, and patriotic Floridian. She has a kind face, light hair, and light blue eyes and looks youthful for a person in her early eighties. From her and her late husband Alfred’s investments and their family business—the downtown Tampa antique and European lighting fixture store Biscayne Lighting (see Figure 3.1)—she appears to be financially well-off. Biscayne Lighting has been owned and operated by the Wasserbergers for sixty-two years, and Sonia still manages the bookkeeping, a skill she learned as a young girl during the war. She has a high-class, old-world style, and life in
Tampa has complimented her. Her home, where we conducted our USF/FHM interview, is like a museum filled with beautiful antiques, paintings, tapestries, vases, artifacts, and ornate lighting fixtures.

Figure 3.1. Sonia’s Family Business, Biscayne Lighting in Tampa, Florida

Sonia was timid at first when speaking to me, especially during our USF/FHM interview. She told me this was because of her lack of confidence in her ability to speak fluent English spontaneously during our formal interview. She also was concerned that she might forget some of the details of her story. Because of these reservations, Sonia wanted to read her handwritten story about her experience during the Holocaust, which she had written some years earlier. She was nervous even to ask me if she could read her story during our interview, fearing it would be inappropriate or unacceptable for a formal, Shoah Foundation-like oral history interview for a museum. When we met for our pre-interview, I assured her that our conversations together were about creating a safe space
where she felt confident and comfortable to say whatever she was compelled to say however she wanted to say it, not about meeting any pre-existing standards of history (Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006). I wanted the interview to be meaningful to her, first and foremost. History was a secondary concern.

I was happy that she had written about her experience. Interestingly though, during our later interactions (which I detail in the pages that follow), she told me that she wished our USF/FHM interview had been more conversational, like our later lunch interviews and casual meetings. Sonia didn’t like that she *read* her story in our USF/FHM interview. She thought it sounded stiff and unemotional. In some senses I agree. It did lead to a different kind and quality of interview and storytelling, a bit relationally disconnected in some ways as she read, less dialogic than I usually like when interviewing. After reflecting on our interviews and writing this chapter, however, I’m glad she told it the way she wanted to initially.

The care she put into writing her story lends itself to this story for a few reasons. Her written tale has more details and is more coherent and linear than the story that emerges in our casual conversations, making it easier for readers to follow the complexities of her family and personal histories. Like Sal’s and Manuel’s stories, however, this is a story crafted out of lost details, silences, voids, and the islands and moments of memory and tellability in-between. Over the process of this research, I’ve come to terms with the fact that I am not a traditional historian or historical detective. I feel it is outside the scope of this project (and impossible) to hunt down and fill in all the details in order to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” This is one of the reasons this is a story that is “beyond testimony” (Greenspan, 2010). Instead of
testimony, it is an interwoven, relational story about affinity beyond traditional boundaries and kinship beyond bloodlines (Haraway, 2004), one with historical underpinnings built of war, genocide, refugees, and survival. It is a story I tell from my own feminist standpoint (Haraway, 1988; Patti, 2012). I am reminded of the opening words of *The Haraway Reader* (2004), of Haraway’s introduction titled “A Kinship of Feminist Figurations:”

These wars [that she’s seen and lived through] are personal. They make me who I am; they throw me into inherited obligations, whether I like it or not. These worlds at war are the belly of the monster from which I have tried to write into a more vivid reality a kin group of feminist figures. My hope is that these marked figures might guide us to a more livable place. (p. 1)

My hope too, through telling these particular stories, is that we are guided to places of greater *peace* and *wisdom* (Sala and Sonia) found in the affinity that comes from sharing intimate, personal stories of survival in a genocidal world *still* at war.

In particular, this is a story about two types of recounting (Greenspan, 2010, forthcoming)—Sonia’s formal, written telling during our USF/FHM interview and our conversational interview at a local diner. Our relationship blossomed during our later informal, conversational interviews, and this led to new perspectives and insights that add to her telling of her written story. The two of them together tell a complimentary, multi-vocal, dialogic story (Cissna & Anderson, 2004).

I have believed since our first pre-interview meeting that there was a natural rapport and affinity between Sonia and me. I have used the word affinity to describe our relationship to others, in field notes, and in my thinking about Sonia for years now.
Affinity shows itself in similar ways in both our recorded interviews, despite their content and relational differences. Like my chapters on Sal (and compassion) and Manuel (and identification), here I examine the cross-cutting, dynamic theme of *ethnographic affinity* as it played out in my interviews with Sonia. I use the lived practice of affinity between us—and Sonia and me as *figures*—in order to expose and illuminate our time and conversations together. I am again reminded of and inspired by Haraway’s (2004) words:

> Figures collect up hopes and fears and show possibilities and dangers. Both imaginary and material, figures root peoples in stories and link them to histories. Stories are always more generous, more capacious, than ideologies; in that fact is one of my strongest hopes. I want to know how to inhabit histories and stories rather than deny them. I want to know how critically to live both inherited and novel kinships. . . . I want to know how to help build ongoing stories rather than histories that end. In that sense, my kinships are about keeping the linages going, even while defamiliarizing their members and turning . . . pedigrees into affinity groups. (p. 1)

Using our dialogic voices, this piece focuses on storying the personal particularities of Sonia’s history and our conversations as an act of compassionate telling. Following our story, I examine broader issues, specifically my emergent theoretical ideas regarding affinity, which is the third foundation of the trinity of themes explored in my dissertation.

**Weaving Together Stories and Real Voices**

In Tony Kushner’s (2006) article “Holocaust testimony, ethics, and the problem of representation,” he suggest that “the strands of history and memory [ought] to be woven together to show the full complexity of survivor identity” (p. 291). The heart of
this chapter comes from weaving together the relational history and memory of my recorded interviews with Sonia. Instead of formally thematizing and analyzing our conversations, using only a few exemplary excerpts as evidence of the themes I’ve found, I decided to weave our conversations into a more in-depth conversational story. To accomplish this, I move back-and-forth between our two recorded interviews (our USF/FHM interview and our audio-recorded, conversational “lunch” interview) in order to show the relational and content contrast and different textures of the stories we tell. The woven story traces chronologically between both conversations in the hope of painting a complex portrait of Sonia’s identity, history, memory, and our relationship. In order to keep the stories clear, I have marked and titled each section as either “USF/FHM” or “Lunch,” and the dialogue from each section corresponds to our formal oral history interview (“USF/FHM”) or our casual, conversational interview (“Lunch”).

This process shows a specific case of what is generated through understanding an individual Holocaust survivor in a way that ventures beyond the canonical frame of single-session, formally conducted life-review interviews. I adopt this approach for a number of ethical-methodological reasons. First, the majority of the work on Holocaust survivor “testimony” tends to use “their voices” as historical evidence and juicy snippets, in order to confirm and tell a broader history of the Holocaust (see, for example, Greene & Kumar, 2000; Smith, 2005). I wish to avoid using Sonia and those I have spoken with in this manner, along with many in the “Collaboration Mafia” (as Henry Greenspan termed us in an email to me, personal communication, January 9, 2013) of working with

28 I explain in the concluding chapter of the dissertation why Sonia and I have only two recorded interviews, one for the USF/FHM project and one audio-recorded at lunch. We met informally numerous times in addition to these two recorded interviews but did not feel the need to record our later conversations.
survivors (see Ellis & Rawicki, forthcoming; Greenspan, 2010; Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006; High, 2009, forthcoming; Patti, forthcoming; Rawicki & Ellis, 2011). Representing at length our storied voices is also inspired by many of the recent waves of critical ethnography in our field (Madison, 2005; Conquergood, 1991, 2002; Rich, 2002).

Further, instead of representing more traditionally thematized and processed “data,” this work builds from the narrative and personal storytelling turns in communication, in particular from those who have inspired me and helped lead these turns (Bochner, 2001, 2010; Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Ellis, 1997, 1998). Finally, storying more of our interactions allows me to show more of what happened between us and, I believe, demonstrates greater appreciation of Sonia and her story. Writing it this way also leads to a multi-layered story in which I can reasonably include as much dialogue and detail as possible.

In the dialogic story that follows, to my ears, Sonia speaks in two voices—her written, narrator voice and her conversational, relational, spontaneous voice. I see the construction of this story—the parts I choose to emphasize and leave out—as terministic (Burke, 1950) acts of conscious and unconscious analysis, embedded in the stories themselves (Boylorn, 2013, R. Boylorn, personal communication, March 19, 2013). I wish for readers to meditate on and open up the affinity and kinship they might feel with this story as they read. This is one of my main goals—in this chapter, dissertation, and in my work generally: to cultivate and broaden our capacities for affinity and kinship across all sorts of difference 29 (Haraway, 2004).

29 As I read her, this is one of Haraway’s main goals as well. She creates feminist figures, in particular her well-known feminist cyborg, in order to cultivate new kinship groups and affinities between and beyond traditional identify markers (gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, etc.), between and beyond
USF/FHM: From the Beginning: “Don’t Forget So-and-So”

On the day of our videotaped USF/FHM interview, August 11, 2010, we speak in Sonia’s spacious, beautifully furnished house, filled with art that looks like it could be in a museum. We are seated on a leather sectional couch, and in front of us is a glass coffee table supported by a large base in the shape of a platinum-colored Jewish star. A grand brick fireplace is on the opposite side of the room. Microphones in place, the video cameras begin taping and Sonia tells me about her wonderful parents and the happy life she had growing up. Her father, Moris Cymerman, was involved with banking, business, real estate, and tailoring. He was a good provider and used to take the family on long vacations. Her mother, Leah Cymerman, stayed at home and took care of her and her sister.

As a girl, she remembers going to a Catholic school in the morning and a Jewish school in the afternoon. She loved Jewish school and feared Catholic school: “The Catholic school was very sad because the teacher would call on me: ‘Sara!’ And when I answered a question he hit my fingers.”

“Was that because of the anti-Semitism that was present?” I ask.

“Correct,” she says. “I remember [19]38, 39—not just me, but especially the boys—we had six or seven Jewish kids in the class. The boys suffered the most, especially in the winter time. They used to hit them and call them names. It was rough. It was sad.”

human/animal/biological divides, between and beyond spiritual/scientific divides, and even between and beyond animate and inanimate objects (e.g. humans and our relationship with technology).

30 Our historically archived, transcribed interview, and publically available audio from our interview, can be found here: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/180/.
“When you were that age, did you have any sense of the kind of chaos that was building at that time?”

“Oh, certainly. We were afraid. A lot of the teachers became sympathizers of Hitler, called *Hitlerows* in Polish. So we knew it, we smelled it, we could tell, even being so young.”

“You mentioned in our pre-interview that your parents are pretty important to how you remember your experience from when you were younger. Did you talk, when you got older, with your parents about what happened during the war?”

“Yeah, mostly my mother spoke about the war. She reminded me of a lot of stuff, growing up and being in the war. We had time to talk.”

Her happy childhood changed when she was eight, in early September, 1939, the war broke out: “September 7, they came in. Hitler’s army came in to our city. I’ll tell you from this,” she says, gesturing to her handwritten story of her experience. Now that we’ve gotten through the introduction of our USF/FHM interview, I get the impression that Sonia wants me to stop asking questions and sit back and listen to her story as she wrote it. I happily oblige.

“Please, yeah,” I encourage her to continue.

She rustles her papers and begins to read: “I am now the voice of the lucky few. This is my story.” She begins by talking about the town in which she grew up and says her family was very observant and practiced all the Jewish traditions. “The war broke out and all our hopes and dreams vanished. September 7, Hitler’s armies came sweeping in and our city was taken over by the Nazis.” Her father and uncle were taken to a concentration camp in Germany, and her mother was left with her, her sister, and elderly
parents. Her mother told them they had to leave. “We left and took our grandparents to a
*mikveh* [a conservative Jewish place, usually a bath, meant to ritually cleanse and purify] far away from our home.” They hid there for only a night. By morning the Nazis captured them and, with guns pointed at the backs of their heads, forced them to the marketplace, where they had gathered other elderly people, women, and children. On their way they saw murdered and wounded friends and neighbors lying in the street. “I will never forget my mother’s face. She was white and trembling. I could read her lips, reciting the *Shema* [an affirmation of Judaism and declaration of faith in God\(^{31}\)].”

Sonia has trouble telling the story here because of her emotion. She slows down and breathes deeply. “In the background we could see our city being set on fire.” The Nazis were going to kill them all. She and her sister, mother, and grandmother were thrown into a synagogue where many were sitting motionless, wall-to-wall, on the ground. Many had already been shot and wounded. They were “crying, praying, and saying their goodbyes.” She continues, “The doors and windows were boarded shut, and the smell of kerosene filled our nostrils. Suddenly a small back door opened. We all fled as fast as we could and escaped along the banks of a nearby river. We found a field to rest and stayed several weeks without food or shelter.” Eventually the Nazis found them again and brought them to a group of captured Jews: “Again the Nazis dehumanized us and shot us as if it were a game. The few of us left were taken to a ghetto nearby. Several times a day the Nazis ridiculed us. On *Rosh Hashana* they took the rabbi and cut off half his beard.” Every day Jews were taken out and never heard from again. “As our suffering

\(^{31}\) [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shema.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shema.html)
continued, my mother told me: ‘Don’t lose your hopes, my child. God will spare us.’ You know,” she tells me, “when I tell you this story, I see pictures of my life.”

Taking her spontaneous reflection as an opportunity to converse I ask, “What do you see?”

“I see those people,” she says solemnly and ambiguously.

I venture a guess and dig a bit deeper, “You see your mother?”

“—sitting and praying and begging,” she explains. She recalls her mother’s words, “‘Don’t forget their name is so-and-so, and to say the Kaddish [the Jewish prayer for the peaceful passing and remembrance of the dead].” It strikes me today that even in remembering this moment in such detail, that she is forgetting the names of “so-and-so,” and I am unable to find them either. This is no fault of Sonia or mine, it is a fault and limit of the human capacity to remember and retell. It reminds me of Sal’s and Manuel’s digging through the mysteries of their memories. It hints at the tragedy of human history and memory more generally—the unstoppable force of time and loss of the specifics of even our most cherished histories and memories (Patti, 2012). I think of the seemingly permanent mountains of societies and memories that have been built over the past million years of human life on the planet, all of which have eroded into sand and been swallowed by the sea.

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Lunch: Relational Appetizers

The date of our informal, conversational lunch interview is May 4th 2011. I pick Sonia up and we drive to a diner in downtown Tampa, on West Kennedy Boulevard, near Biscayne Lighting. Inside is a noisy restaurant atmosphere, unlike the relatively quiet dim
sum restaurants with Manuel and very different from our formal interview setting. As we
sit down I give her the Institutional Review Board consent form, which she signs, and I
start my audio-recorder.

Just then a male waiter asks, “What can I get y’all to drink?”

“Can I get an unsweet iced tea?” I ask.

“Water please,” says Sonia.

“Thank you very much,” I say to her as she hands me the IRB form.

“I wish you all the best,” she replies. “I know you’re a good student.”

“I’ve been doing pretty—” I begin to say.

“—but if you need our help in any way—you need any people—no—I don’t
know, I don’t know.” She says, half-offering to help, half-taking back her offer. Over the
course of our lunch conversation I would learn to relish the strategic ambiguity
(Eisenberg, 2007) of Sonia’s utterances and spontaneous conversational style.

I play along with her, ignoring her “no” and say with a smile, “I will definitely
take you up on that.” She laughs. I add, “I just need to get the dissertation done. I’ve got a
committee, Dr. Ellis. I’m very blessed.”

“Yes, yes,” she says proudly. “Oh, I would like to meet your parents and tell them
how good a guy’s son they have.”

I laugh and smile at her wonderful wording then say, “Well hopefully next year at
the defense my family will be coming into town, so we’ll have to get together.”

“Wonderful, wonderful. I just experienced this like a year or so ago, with my
grandson who just finished med school.”

“That’s awesome,” I say.
“I know,” she says. “He’s now, I believe, in his second year of residency. Very hard working guy, like you.” We talk about her love of being a grandmother and how glad she was that she married young and had children young. “When it’s meant to be it just happens,” she says.

“How old were you when you got married?” I ask.

She laughs. “I was young. I was—”

“But that was the time as well, right?”

“Yeah, it was the time because we were married in ’49 [when she was 17]. My husband wanted to go to Israel [for the honeymoon].”

“And he was a survivor too, right?”

“Yeah. And I said, ‘Alright, we can go [to Israel].’”

She orders a breakfast of eggs and grits and I say, “You’re like a southerner with the grits.”

“Yeah, a lot of Americans, they take cereal from boxes, but I like a hot meal in the mornings.”

“Yeah, I prefer oatmeal or grits over cold cereal as well,” I admit.

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**USF/FHM: Reunited and the Journey to the End of the World**

Soon after Sonia’s family was put in the ghetto, she tells me, “We were reunited—oh my gosh—with my father.” Her father had been released from a German concentration camp as part of a Russian prisoner exchange. They gave him twenty-four hours to leave German territory. Miraculously he found his family and they left for the Soviet-occupied Russian border. They reached the city of Bialystok. “The Red Army
occupied the eastern part of Poland. Bialystok served mainly as a sleeping place for refugees, who were arriving in the thousands. When we arrived, there was no room, not even for one more family. Again, we had to leave.” Luckily, a friend of her father, who lived in the nearby city of Hancewicze, allowed them to stay with him. While life was still uncertain, for a while Sonia went back to school.

The year was 1940. Her grandfather acted as their link to the news of the outside world, and he would go to the synagogue to meet with other Jews who were in-the-know. “He came home and told us that Russia is a communist country and would not allow worship, prayers: ‘They don’t believe in God,’ he said. This was against everything he believed in. So, my grandfather made the decision not to register as a Russian citizen. I was kind of upset about it, because I was in school, I was in a play, and I had fun. But, of course, the decision was for the grown-ups to make, not for us. We registered to go back to Germany, meaning German territory.” The Germans did not want more Jews and the Russians saw Jews who did not want to be Russian citizens as suspect. “In the middle of the night Russians came knocking loudly on the door. ‘Get up!’ they ordered. The Russians said, ‘If you don’t want to become our citizens and the Germans don’t want you, you’re spies.”

Sonia and her family were sent to Siberia. “It was a terrible trip. My family was herded into a cargo train with many other people. When we entered the car the doors were closed, locked behind us. The car was crowded, filled to overflowing with refugees, cramped and uncomfortable, no facilities. After two days of travel we were taken into a big field. We were swarmed by flies that bit us. In the field, I met a beautiful girl named Hannah. I remember she had long pigtails.” Sonia was drawn to Hannah for some reason
but their meeting was cut short. “We were placed in boats. The journey was very
dangerous. It seemed to take forever. The boats kept filling up with water. We were given
cups to—”

“Bail?” I help her with the word.

“—bail out the water of the Northern Dvina River. Finally, we reached an area of
many islands. Our journey ended at what seems to be the end of the world, the cold land
of Siberia.” They were taken to a heavily forested island. “The tall trees towered over us.
I felt so small and insignificant.” Each day the men were taken into the forest to chop
down trees, which the women cleaned. “This was manual labor, hard labor. It was
backbreaking work with no rest. Our island was populated by criminals who had been
sent there for many years.” Her father bargained with the guards for a better job for his
family, using the bag of corn he had the foresight to bring with him. “Father was assigned
to place numbers on the trees the men had chopped down. Mother was also given a better
job: she was to work indoors in the kitchen, all because of the corn. It was 1941. I was ten
years old.”

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Lunch: “This is Me”

“So, what else do you want me to talk about?” she asks. Her question makes me
laugh and think to myself, I’m not exactly sure.

“Well, I’ve kind of been wondering, how do you find yourself lately? Do you find
yourself coming back to your memories of the Holocaust a lot? And what does it mean to
you to be remembering today? That’s kind of an abstract question but—”
“You see,” she tells me, “I’m a widow. My kids are all over. I have friends, but I don’t have friends [who are] Holocaust survivors. I don’t have a common language [with other survivors].”

“Why do you say that? Do you feel you don’t have the same experience as other survivors?” I ask.

“Well, I don’t know how to explain it. They’re older than me, number one. They suffered a lot. I love people. I enjoy people. I think I make more friends with young people. Like the other day, it was the Holocaust memorial [day], this lady took me [to the Florida Holocaust Museum] because I cannot drive so far. [There] I met a survivor I haven’t seen. It was a wonderful thing for me to meet her. She hugged me, kissed me, we cried. I love people, obviously other people like me too. This is how it goes in life. I’m not a monster. I wouldn’t handle people badly—it’s mean. I can’t be mean. Sometimes I hear something I may not [like]—I let it go. It’s no use.”

“So it sounds like you’ve been that way your whole life—just connecting with people.”

“Must-a be, must-a be, yes. I always had friends wherever I was: I was in Uzbekistan; I was in Russian; I was in Germany. I always had girlfriends or boyfriends. I didn’t ever have a steady boyfriend. They used to teach me how to ride a bicycle. They were boys. I used to like to go to shows to see good pieces of theatre and operas and mostly musicals. [I was] happy.”

“Those are still some of my favorites, classic musicals,” I say.

“This is me. I like a good book. I’m different, and I am happy with myself. I have a business, you see, and I take care of it, and I still do the bookkeeping.”
USF/FHM: Stuck in Siberia, Jailed in Uzbekistan

After arriving in Siberia, because she could write and speak Russian, Sonia was selected to record prisoners’ names in the record books. “It was a good job with privileges. Occasionally candy was passed out, and I got the extra candy. I did my job well, and I was elevated to the position of mail [carrier] for the island. One day, carrying mail to another island, I met Hannah again [the girl she had met once before, in a field upon first coming to Siberia]. I was so thrilled to see her. She was equally glad to see me. We hugged; we kissed each other. We shared what was happening in our lives and agreed to meet again.”

Her father became friends with the island chief and his wife, and the chief gave Moris and Sonia’s family special food privileges. Moris used his tailoring skills to make clothes for the family and chief’s friends and family. “My parents were only in their early thirties. Because of their young age, they were able to adapt and survive. Older people could not. The islands were close to Alaska. During the summer it was daylight all night long. We lived in barracks, about thirty people to a room. In the cold Siberian winters, there was no heat in the barracks. Our people were very ingenious, so they built a stove for the room, but you had to stand near the stove for warmth. Our beds were simple wooden planks with no mattresses. They were very hard. I had to choose between wearing my coat to keep warm or sleeping on it for comfort.”

In 1941 the war between Russia and Germany started. The guards on the island were called away to war. “There was a mass exodus from Siberia. There was no one left. Suddenly, we were free! We didn’t have nobody there to give us orders.”
“All the guards were called up,” I say, letting her know I’m following.

“Yeah, so we were free, but not knowing where to go or how to make the trip.”

“You’re stuck in Siberia,” I say in amazement.

“Yeah, it was water all over. So some men who were very industrious decided to build rafts from fallen trees and have the journey on water. Mother and I didn’t go. She was a very religious woman and said, ‘I go with God. God will show me the way. And please come, Sala,’ as she called me. So I went with mother. But then my grandmother died before we got free. She died in Siberia.”

“Do you know how she passed?”

“Yeah. One day they took my sister and me out of the barracks. Bubbe, my grandma, she was in bed. I didn’t know why they took us away. They [the adults] saw the end of my grandma, and they didn’t want us to see how she passed.”

“So she was just tired and old and maybe sick at the time?” I ask to clarify.

“She was constantly in bed, as long as I remember, as long as we were in Siberia, which was over a year I think. She was always in bed. But lovely, lovely lady, wonderful. Um—”

Sensing Sonia has lost the thread of her narrative I remind her, “You were talking about the raft.”

“Yeah, so a tragedy occurred that day. My father, sister, and grandfather went on one of the rafts. Grandfather fell off the raft into Siberian waters and died. His body was buried in Siberia, far from home; only a stick marked his grave.”

Because of her grandfather’s death the family decided to abandon the idea of using a raft to escape Siberia. Instead, her father managed to hire a boat and they traveled
down the same river on which they had arrived. It was a long, difficult trip. “Many people became ill. During that time England became engaged in the war against Germany, and General [Wladyslaw] Sikorski, a Polish general from England, recognized Hitler as a threat to world freedom, not just to Jews. So, we were faced, as Polish citizens—which they called us (the Russians made us Polish citizens)—we didn’t know where to go. A group of survivors knew where the war was going on, so they decided to go to Uzbekistan. We followed.”

They went to the city of Bukhara and united with other refugees from Russia, Poland, Romania, and many other neighboring countries. “There were a lot of Muslims [in Bukhara], a veiled city with Middle Eastern architecture.” The houses were made of straw and cement. “They offered little privacy or security.” There Sonia’s family found a place to rent. All the family’s belongings fit into two suitcases. “We used the suit cases for our beds.” Communist city officials of Bukhara checked on them daily, to ensure they followed the rules. Food was rationed, and they were hungry.

One day, while at the market looking to buy food, her mother came across old acquaintances from Poland. These acquaintances asked if they could stay with Sonia’s family. Not knowing their old acquaintances were smugglers, the family agreed. “Eventually, they got caught, and the police came to our house. They searched the house and found my father’s $520, which was all the money he had saved, all we had left. I’ll never forget it. The police carried my father and me to jail. I remember it like now. We stayed in jail overnight. They separated me from my father.”

“Do you remember what your father said to you when you were being taken to jail? Did he say anything? What were you thinking?”
“Well, they couldn’t take my mother because she became ill. They couldn’t take my sister; she was younger than me. So they took my father and me to jail, and they separated us and interrogated me. They took me—I remember like now—and they said, ‘Do you know how to write Russian?’ I knew it a little. ‘Okay, write. First tell us from where he got the money.’ I was already maybe twelve, thirteen, or more, so I understood the fear that they might take me—not as much me but my father—away. But I made up a story.” She no longer remembers the specific of the story she made up. What she does remember: “My father was wise and listened at the keyhole. He was afraid for me. In Europe they have the big keys, and it was a big keyhole, so he was looking in the keyhole and listening to my stories. It was crucial for our stories to match. If our stories were not matched, I don’t know what would happen to us. Probably no one would have ever seen us alive again. So, it’s all miracles. You see now, my life? Our stories were the same. They let us go.” I marvel at imagining Sonia’s story. It seems to me like one normally seen in a film. I can picture her father listening at the keyhole, hear the fearful tone of Sonia’s young voice as she made up a story convincing enough for the guards to spare her and her father’s lives.

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Lunch: “Looks Can Be Deceiving” and Intergenerational Affinity

Sonia’s demeanor during our casual interview is much different than when we first met and during our formal interview. She projects a confidence that I find appealing. I ask, “Have you always been so secure with yourself or has this come with age?”
“No, I believe I was because of my parents. I was the oldest, and I had to help them. For instance, as you know we had a hard time. Many times I didn’t look Jewish. My father didn’t look like Jewish either.”

“Is that because you had blue eyes and lighter hair?”

“Yeah, my mother had blue eyes. My dad is [the] same.”

“Well, that’s funny because I’m not Jewish but people sometimes think I am Jewish,” I admit. “Most Holocaust survivors I have spoken with have asked me if I was Jewish, many of them thinking I was. When I tell people about the subject of my dissertation that’s usually their first question: “‘Are you Jewish?’”

That people often assume I am Jewish makes sense to Sonia, and she says, “It’s the Semitic race, yeah. My husband was like you, dark. And we girls like the dark, handsome guys.” She gives me a compliment and offers a little innocent flirting (or at least that’s what I assume was happening).

Pleased, I run with it, “I’m hoping that still stays today—that women still like dark and handsome—”

“Oh yeah, they still do,” she smiles. A moment later she says, “In my life, and I told you this story before but when I did [during our USF/FHM interview], I wish I wouldn’t [have] read it. I would [have] just like[d] to tell you like I am] now, [to] talk—it’s better.”

“We’ll have plenty of time to have more conversations,” I reassure her. Reflecting on her statement, I am again glad that Sonia spoke from her written record of her experience during our formal interview and that we later had the chance to talk informally. I think we got to maximize the meaning shared between us this way and get
to show the best of both worlds in this chapter—the details and more linear history that came from our formal interview and the dialogic, compassionate, conversational spontaneity and relationality of our informal interview.

“I was nervous [during our USF/FHM interview],” she admits.

Thinking this might be related to the pressure of “speaking for history,” I ask, “How does it feel, at this moment in time, being one of the remaining survivors? Do you feel a responsibility? What can we do with the remaining time that we have to speak with survivors?”

“Yeah, that’s why I’m so happy to have had a chance to do an interview,” she responds. “Any help I can give you or others, I’d be glad to. And it’s all I can do. It’s important that we’re here to tell the story, ‘cause otherwise no one would know it.”

*****

**USF/FHM: Typhus Outbreak after Being Freed—a Dream of Death/Life**

Right after Sonia was released from jail with her father in Uzbekistan, an outbreak of Typhus swept the area: “The streets of the city were lined with sick people lying all around. I remember like now. Everywhere looked terrible. I became ill, and they took me to the hospital. I was running a high fever, and there were no doctors available, or medication. While I was in bed I had a scary dream. I see a man dressed in black, and [he] wanted to kill me. [He] came after me with a knife. He chased me until he caught me. I cried and begged him not to kill me. I told him I am too young to die. When I woke up, the girl next to me was covered with a sheet. She had died while I was asleep. Most people in the hospital died. But I got better. I was one of the fortunate ones that went home.”
“That’s pretty amazing that you still remember that dream,” I say.

“I will never forget it. When I first told the story to someone, I was hysterical crying, but now I’m,” she pauses, “not crying.”

Lunch: Never Forgetting Her Faith and the Good and Bad of Americans Today

“I am also a religious person,” Sonia tells me. “I believe in higher power. I know the bible. They [the catholic school] taught me the bible. When I come to synagogue, I read. I do my prayers. I know my prayers by heart, since I was little, because I study it. It’s this way. You see miracles—you know—miracles.”

Wanting her to clarify and expand on her faith in the face of the Holocaust I ask, “So you were always very religious, from a young age. How did you grapple with the Holocaust? When did you know the whole picture of what had happened during the Holocaust? It must not have been until after, and you could look back and see just how huge and how terrible everything was. How old were you when you realized the scope of what had happened, and how did you deal with that with your faith? Did it challenge you at all? Or did you just believe even stronger, that you had to have some faith?”

“I never forgot my faith,” she says with conviction. “A lot of Jewish people did. Because how could God see—like I saw [a Nazi soldier throw] a little baby [at] a tree. [He] killed this baby. I was [thinking], ‘What is he doing?’ But, in my life, God blessed me not to be alone, to be with my parents. And I had a very religious mother. When we were in the ghettos, my mother was alone. One day was quiet. Because they used to come to us—the Germans—and take out mostly women. We did not see them again. And gosh I was already at that time eight. I was a big girl. I said, ‘Don’t go.’ The Germans came
every day. They said, ‘Everybody out in the middle.’ How would I say it—it was like a marketplace and they gathered the women in the middle. [The Germans] took over. They took pictures of us. Every day was like this, until it was a-hundred, maybe fifty remained. Who knows? I don’t know.”

She continues, “We were lucky also in the ghetto because we had a little tiny room, because the one who owned the mill, he was related to us. He gave us this little place, so at least we were separate. Anyway, one day was quiet. My mother took us, I remember my sister and me by the hands, and said, ‘Let’s run.’ We ran out of the ghetto, and we were in hiding. It was awful. But my mother was very brave. She dressed up like a peasant and used to go to elderly Germans for stale bread and soap. They could shoot her. But she did it for the kids.”

Imagining Sonia’s mother’s hardships sparks me to ask, “When you see people today who complain about everything—and I’m one of ‘em. We complain. We’re so privileged, and we have so many things, and we like to complain about everything. How do you deal with that?”

“I say, ‘Well, why? This is a stupid thing to do.’ Like they complain about stupid—I never complained.”

“Would you say living through that experience helped you to appreciate everything since then?”

“Every child who was born to us gave us a special luck,” she explains, speaking about her children and the blessings she’s had in her life since the war. “One gave us a place to live. And another, we bought a car.” She laughs. “Well, you know, for instance, I’ll tell you one thing.”
“Please.”

“When I came to this country, I was invited somewhere. It was a bunch of ladies talking. And they said, ‘Sonia, what are you first? Are you first Jewish or American?’ I said I was Jewish, and I’m not ashamed to. And they said, ‘No, no. We’re in America. How can you say you’re Jewish first?’ They were yelling at me.”

“They just couldn’t understand,” I say. “That, to me, is one of the things that I love about America: Whatever culture you come from, we don’t tell you to eradicate it—or we shouldn’t.” I switch the gears of my thought as I say it, realizing all the cultural genocide and oppression that has happened in the history of the U.S. Yet, at our core, as a diverse nation of immigrants, I do think we aspire to such openness.

“The best country in the world,” she says, echoing the sentiments of every Holocaust survivor with whom I have spoken. “I love America,” she says proudly.

“So what else would you say, today, that Americans just don’t get or don’t understand?”

“They are spoiled. They have everything. We don’t have our grandparents, our great grandparents, our families. We just came with ourselves. We worked hard. We studied scholarship. Each kid went to work. He’s eleven, twelve—he goes to work. This is what it is. We had to help ourselves and save money for ourselves.”

Noticing that I’ve been asking question after question while eating my lunch and Sonia’s grits are getting cold I say, “I should let you eat. I’ve been asking so many questions.”

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no, please do [continue],” she says, repeating “no” eight times.
I take her up on the offer, “Are there things that you’re still struggling with today, or memories? Are there things that you want to remember? How do you deal with that kind of stuff?” I ask her some of the questions that seemed to spark so much reflection and interaction between Sal, Manuel, and me.

Sonia responds in her own way, a way I’ve become accustomed to and appreciate: “Yeah. Well, it’s—my daughter tells me I’ve very strong. I thank God for whatever I have. I do what I can, and that’s it. And I will say like my mother said, ‘Money is by God.’ Live with hope. It will come.”

“And that’s hope in the face of the Holocaust,” I add.

“Exactly. That’s because [we] survived.” Sonia puts it bluntly.

“And you’re the living proof of that. ‘Cause it’s so hard, in studying the Holocaust, a lot of the big historians and Holocaust scholars get upset when they see redemption in a Holocaust story (Langer, 1991; Young, 1988), which I understand. But at the same time, we can’t just focus on the negative, which is enormous, which is unknowable, and that needs to be important.”

“Right,” she agrees with my abstract perspective on the (anti)redemption debate.

I continue, “But you and other survivors are evidence that no, this wasn’t complete. And there is hope, still, even in the face of the Holocaust.”

“It’s luck we live. It’s luck we have our health. A lot of people cannot take it. They say, ‘Ah, you’re crazy. What you talkin’ about?’ Well, so, I stop talking.”

Sonia’s thought—that she stops talking when she gets the impression that people can’t take what she has to say—leaves me reflecting on how I listen to her, other survivors, and others’ stories more generally. I listen in ways that open up conversations
and stories, not in ways that critique people or cut them down. I pry. I personalize. I empathize. I familiarize. (I am again reminded of kinship and affinity and the connection between becoming familiar and familial). As a result, Sonia and those I have worked with on this project, and on previous projects, keep talking. They don’t stop. I’m beginning to realize the obvious lesson I am learning here.

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USF/FHM: Reunited with Hannah, the End of the War, and the Return Home

Sonia continues her story about surviving typhus: “On the way home from the hospital, Hannah’s sister saw me. She blessed me with happiness and ran to tell Hannah. Hannah came to see me, and we had a wonderful reunion. In our youthfulness, we soon found ways to enjoy childhood activities together and made the most of the situation. Life continued. My mother was proud of me,” she laughs. “Uzbekistan, so I was a big girl. I was thirteen, right?”

“That’s right,” I confirm for her.

Toward the end of the war, in the summer of 1944, she noticed something: “Coming home from school in Bukhara, I noticed a truck parked on the street with the imprint on the door ‘USA.’ I was extremely happy and ran home to tell my parents that the Americans were here—I was really so happy! This was a beginning of hope and survival, [in a place and time] where people were dying of hunger and typhus.

“[It was the year nineteen] forty-five. The war ended, and I was still in Bukhara.” Along with thousands of other refugees, Sonia’s family needed to procure the appropriate legal documents in order to get back home to Poland. “So, with good luck and with good people [who] helped us, we were able to get our papers. We took a train; again, it was a
cattle train. [It was an] extremely hard trip. Again: no facilities; no water; no nothing.

Three families were traveling in our car.” She tells the story of getting off the train to fetch water at a stop. The train left as she ran toward it with her filled bucket. Her family was “hysterical, crying.” A Polish officer heard the commotion and quickly grabbed Sonia, throwing her to her family on the accelerating locomotive. “It was wonderful. ‘I lost the water,’ I said, but I was reunited with my family thanks to this officer.”

She tells the sad story of the return home: “When we arrived in Poland my father did not know what to do. Our city had been burned during the war and most of our families and friends had died. The devastation of war was everywhere. Now we all decided to keep on moving on to a city named Szczecin, Poland. It had been part of Germany before the war; but the war changed many things, including national boundaries. A cousin of my father saw us and was shocked to see we were alive. We had a place to stay, he said. There were many different refugees from different countries.”

She continues, “The year was 1948. The American Joint Distribution Committee, JDC, helped refugees after the war. They were our angels. Many were dying daily, and they helped us with food and other necessities. They took us to Berlin and helped us to get a place. We became humans again. We settled in Berlin. It was freedom. We arrived with our lives only, and our family is with our God. Berlin was a new beginning for me. [Eventually] I was accepted into a business school.”

She continues, “Provisions became restricted, and the DP camps closed. So we could no longer remain in Berlin. The Joint took us to Bavaria by plane. This was a big event for me. They took us to a city named Deggendorf, Bavaria. As we drove by the facility, I saw a lot of young people watching us. [One] young man [in particular] saw me
and tried to find out where I was taken. He was the head of the welcome committee. His name was Alfred. We became friends, and, soon after, in December 1948, we got married under JDC chuppah (see Figure 3.2 below). In 1949 we arrived in the USA and raised a family. I was blessed with four wonderful children,” she says as she finishes her formal, written family (her)story. She shifts, “Now I want to—”

**Figure 3.2 Sonia and Alfred Married under JDC Chuppah**

Sensing she is ready to close the interview I interject: “Before you say the last thing that you’d like to say, I feel like there is one story left to explore. I was wondering if you could talk to me a little bit more about your relationship with Hannah.”

“Oh, yes,” she says in a pleased voice.

“Is her name Hannah Adrozinski? Is that right?”
“Yes.”

“You have a special relationship with her.”

“Very special. She was like a sister to me. She dreamed to go to England, where her uncles were, and I dreamed to go to America, to my uncles. So, I gave her my uncle’s address, I still remember, and she gave me hers in London.” They kept in contact through the mail until Hannah reached Israel in 1949. “We already lived in Tampa; I decided to go to Israel and meet her. It was a beautiful country. I was there two weeks. And from then on we communicated, and she decided to come to Tampa to visit me. But this story has a sad ending. Two years ago, I heard the news that she passed away. It was a terrible thing.”

“She was your sister in the war,” I say.

On the verge of tears she says, “Later on, my parents even immigrated to Israel, and she was like a daughter to them. But I lost her as well.”

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Lunch: The Importance of Talking Together—Telling, Listening, Remembering

Because she finds so much meaning and value in telling her story, toward the end of our lunch together, I ask the converse question: “Do you find other survivors who don’t like to talk about their experience?”

“Ah, I don’t know. They like to talk. It depends,” she says simply.

“I have heard from a couple of survivors—one family member who’s a survivor finds a lot of meaning in telling his story. This is Solomon Wainberg. I don’t know if you know him?”

“I heard of him.”
“One of his family members refuses to talk about her experience and doesn’t like that he talks about his experience.”

“That’s wrong,” she says flatly.

“That’s what he says.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s how I feel in some senses as well.” I admit, though I respect those who can’t and wish not to tell.

“Yeah, yeah. The older I get the more I want to talk,” she echoes Sal and Manuel’s sentiments.

“Mm-hmm. What is that, ‘cause that seems pretty common to human experience? What’s the mystery there? Why do people want to talk more?”

She takes my question personally: “I want people to know. I thank—like you for instance—I thank you for listening to my stories. A lot of people don’t want to hear it. When I talk to [people] sometimes, and I say, ‘It reminds me of a story. I was here and there and this and this happened.’ And they say, ‘Why do you talk about this today? I don’t want to hear it.’ So I thank those people who want to hear—because we’re not going to be [here] forever. And we are the witnesses.”

“That’s the thing that really scares me—and one of the many reasons why this is by far the most important work I’ve ever done—because people are so quick to doubt things,” I respond. “Especially today when you can get news from all angles—it’s not really connected to facts anymore. But somebody who survived something, in their lived experience—I can never tell you that you didn’t experience it. You know that you experienced it. You and other survivors are those witnesses. It’s so important to
document that now, before it’s too late. And to me one of the big things is that people just hear what they want to hear today. They don’t listen to stories that might not be their own stories. They only want to hear what they already agree with. Can you hear something that you disagree with? Can you listen to that and—”

“Right,” she says, supporting my compassionate, storytelling, ideological position.

Sensing we’re on the same page, I ask, “You’ve led a charmed life but also a life that has had a lot of struggle in it. So, what are the things that matter to you most today? What are the things that really matter at this point?”

“Well, at my age now, I want to do good things for my kids, my grandkids. I want to be healthy and have my marbles still.” We laugh. As the waiter comes to deliver our check, Sonia says, “Yeah, thank you. It was very good. Maybe let me pick up the check?”


“[You’re] welcome. Thank you! I thank God,” she says. “I look with my eyes open and I see the world. I see the world [as] good because there’s more good people than bad. I have so much fun talking to you. You will grow up, God willing, and be very successful with everything because your character, your personality shows it to me. Yes.”

“Thank you. I’m just interested in what people find meaning in, what people care about. And I care about people,” I explain to her why I think she might perceive me as having good ethos.

“It’s a very human person to see people,” she says.

I say, “We’re all human. We’re all struggling—even some rich lawyer in New York, you know.”
“Yeah, yeah—this is what I say. I say, ‘Alright, even if he’s rich, believe me he has his problems too.’ Even more so,” she adds.


Sonia gives me some life lessons: “Be always happy for what you have. Hope for better if you want better, of course—nothing wrong with that. But don’t cry over spilt milk. See, you are a student. Work hard. It’s not easy to study. But, where’s a will it’s a way, they say.” The way she says the common phrase (where there’s a will there’s a way) is one of my favorite expressions from interviewing survivors. It’s so Sonia.

I tell her, “I feel very privileged. I wouldn’t want to do anything else. So, any time I think it’s too difficult, I just realize how lucky I am to be here. And I get to talk with people like you, so—what else would you want?”

“God gives me my life. I’m privileged to have my business, my daughter.”

“How long ago was it that your husband passed?” I ask.

“It’s been eleven years. Every year when the day comes, I visit the synagogue, and they give me a blessing. You see, I’m a little—some people say—I like to remember who I am.”

“I’m the same way. My father passed away when I was fourteen.”

“I’m sorry.”

“But I still remember him today. It’s not just a sad thing. I would imagine for you, it’s not just a sad thing to remember him.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“It helps you to embrace him and his memory and these sorts of things.”
“Right. Exactly. I see the kids. Marilyn [her daughter] has dark eyes. She’s like the two of us.”

“How old is Maryland now?”

“Maryland, believe it or not, she’s 54.”

“Oh my gosh.”

“She doesn’t look it.”

“No, she is just gorgeous and looks like she’s in her thirties.”

“Yes, nobody believes it. She’s already a grandma, and I’m a great grandma.”

“Oh, my gosh. That’s pretty amazing. Well you probably get mistaken for much younger still, I would imagine,” I say, complimenting her.

“Thank you. I look in the mirror and I say, ‘Who is it?’” She laughs. “Sometimes I look in the mirror and I say, ‘Run away!’ But God give me what he gives me. I want to be healthy,” she says, adding: “I want to tell you this story before we go.”

“Please, please.”

“When people talk my mind comes up with a new story. So this is a new story. My father, after the war, was looking for his family. He had four sisters and two brothers with parents. One man noticed my father. They were from the same city. My father asked the man a question: ‘I’m looking for my family. Have you heard anything?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I’m sorry to tell you. I was with your father [Sonia’s grandfather] in Babi Yar.’”

“That was a Russian work camp,” I say. “Is that right?”

“Yes, it was [19]41, 42, 43. They started killing. [Before Sonia’s grandfather was killed he said] ‘Let me put my prayer shawl on, then I’ll jump and you can kill me.’”
Remembering her story from our pre-interview I clarify, “And there was a mass grave, right?”

“There was a mass grave.”

I add “People were being shot and thrown into—”

“Right. And this guy who knew this story, who lived to see this story, he was also shot but they didn’t hit him because he was little, tiny. He went through all the dead people around and hide himself. At night he came out of this thing. He remembered this story. He said [to my father], ‘That’s how I remember.’ It’s another miracle.”

“It’s so strange how those miracles are tied to something that is unimaginably upsetting and terrible,” I comment, riffing on my usual theme of the contradictions and dialectical tensions of life/death that characterize Holocaust survivor stories. I continue, “You said a couple times, people don’t have the same language to talk about these things. It’s almost otherworldly; it’s almost from another universe where these things happened that normal people can’t imagine (Langer, 1991). But that doesn’t make them [the stories] any less true. It’s just so hard to understand what that would actually be like.”

“Yeah, it’s been so long. It’s still, when the day comes, the Holocaust memorial day, and I’m talking about it, it just, I’m depressed because all those things. But I say, ‘Thank God I was a kid and I can tell the stories. Whatever I could not remember my mother always said, ‘Do you remember this? Do you remember?’ She was talking about it all the time.” Sonia again tells me the story of being arrested with her father.

“That’s a miracle,” I say.

“I believe that God told me [what to say to escape].”

“Wow, wow,” I exclaim.
USF/FHM: Affirming Conclusions

“Well, thank you for sharing Hannah with us, because now we can remember her, too.”

“Right. Now I want to say a few words: It’s our faith and spirit that gave us hope even in the most dreadful of moments. This I feel is what makes our people so resilient and so successful. Right now we can only rely on education to ensure that something this tragic never occurs again. And whatever we may endure as Jews, I know that our innate pride and will to survive will carry us eternally. Let us also remember being forever united in working together with all people of good will to fight religious and racial hatred, so we can say, ‘Never again.’ Thank you.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you. The memory you left with us—I talked to my parents. The love you gave us, gave me strength to carry on [our] legacy.” She takes a moment to weep quietly then says again, “Thank you.” The tape ends of our formal interview ends.

Lunch: Dialogic Ethnographic Affinity

At an hour and thirty minutes into our lunch conversation she says, “Well, I don’t want to keep you. I had a good time, and I enjoyed being with you. Good luck with your work.”

I unconsciously leave my recorder running as we leave the restaurant, a fact I realize later as I transcribe. We walk to my car, and I drive her back home. “Today young people are smart,” she tells me as we drive.
“Yes and no,” I say. “Sometimes I feel like young people don’t have a clue.”

“Well it depends on how you deal with your life.” We banter back and forth as we drive. She talks more about her daughter Marilyn and then says, “I talk too much.”

“I don’t think you talk too much.”


“Do you have any questions for me—about the project in general?”

“I’m very proud of you, number one—of young people like you. And to take, what do I want to say, a job with me, to come and take me and to do all this, it’s—I’ll put it in my book.”

“Well, good. This is my favorite part. It doesn’t feel like a job at all. This is my favorite part of what I do.”

“Oh, this will stay with you all your life. You make your parents proud.”

“Yeah, I know my parents are proud. And one of the things, my dad worked for Baxter Healthcare. He was a vice president. So, he was a business guy. But one of his dreams was to become a professor, and he never did that. He went back to get his MBA, and he wanted to continue on and get a Ph.D., but by that time he had kids. So, he needed to get a ‘real job,’ one that paid more than a graduate student makes. I think in some ways the reason I decided to become a professor is because that was one of his dreams.”

“That’s wonderful,” she says. “You never know. Something is there.”

“I feel it, I do. The other week I had to defend my dissertation proposal. That morning, when I was driving to school, I felt my dad’s presence. Then, right when I parked my car, I happened to see, on the car right next to me, a UConn sticker: University of Connecticut, that’s where he went.”
“Oh, my God.”

“You don’t see many of those in this neighborhood,” I say.

“Oh, my God,” she says again. “That’s what I said! This is it. I see my parents. I see my husband. You know, I had a dream even. I could swear that I felt a kiss from my husband. And then I woke up.”

“Wow, I got goose bumps,” I tell her, marveling at our connection and the quasi-spiritual, quasi-mystical moment of kinship we’re sharing.

“Yeah. I’ll never forget it,” she says. Just then we pull up to her house. “This is fine,” she says as I pull into her driveway.

“Well, it was a pleasure,” I tell her.

“Always it is my pleasure to talk with you. I wish you all the best, honey.”

**Possibilities for Broadening Ethnographic Affinity and Kinship**

It remains to be seen whether all ‘epistemologies’ as Western political people have known them fail us in the task to build effective affinities. (Haraway, 2004, p. 16)

The ethic of this chapter comes from a curious confluence of influences and voices and is an effort to build effective affinities—between Sonia and me, between readers and this text, and perhaps, to suggest the possibility of opening up new affinities in our lives and interactions more generally. While searching for a way to theoretically ground my work with Sonia and thinking of our relationship as one based on a feeling of affinity, I was reminded of Haraway’s (2004) limited yet central reference to affinity in
her introduction to *The Haraway Reader*, “A Kinship of Feminist Figurations.” Since first reading her work, I have been drawn to Haraway as a boundary-breaking scholar interested in critical, imaginative approaches to the history of human consciousness. Her writing as a post-modern “cyborg feminist” interested in connections between philosophy, theory, oppression, and material bodies represents a cutting edge of feminist, critical theory that avoids pitfalls of simple identity politics while working to bridge classical, Western divides and hierarchies of self/other (among many others).

Haraway rallies against traditional, patriarchal understandings of human experience and calls for “situated [and situating] selves” (Haraway, 1988), building, in non-essentialist ways, on feminist standpoint theory (Hartstock, 1983). In this way, she adds needed support and an additive counterpoint to my use of Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification in the previous chapter:

> It is important to note that the effort to construct revolutionary standpoints, epistemologies as achievements of people committed to changing the world, has been part of the process showing the limits of identification. The acid tools of post-modernist theory and the constructive tools of ontological discourse about revolutionary subjects might be seen as ironic allies in dissolving Western selves in the interest of survival. (Haraway, 2004, p. 16)

What really spoke to me about Haraway, and why I use the notion of affinity as an identification-widening lens with which to view my work with Sonia Wasserberger, was the way Haraway reoriented me to post-modern, feminist perspectives which seek to generate kinship beyond traditional boundaries. In this sense, her notion of fearless affinity with “others” (even non-human, non-biological others) helps motivate and justify
my embodied, relational feelings of affinity with Sonia as well as the wider philosophical argument of asking others to feel affinity for our story and more affinity in their own lives. As Haraway (2004) reminds me once again:

And who counts as ‘us’ in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called ‘us,’ and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? . . . The recent history for much of the U.S. left and U.S. feminism has been a response to this kind of crisis by endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition—affinity, not identity. (p. 14).

My use of feminist affinity and personal storytelling recalls an interaction I had with Henry Greenspan in March of 2012, while I was staying with him as a guest during the “Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence” conference in Montreal. We were taking the fifteen-minute walk to the conference one cold morning, up a hill along the sidewalk of a beautiful city street. We were conversing in our usual way about the minitua and praxis of listening to and telling the stories of Holocaust survivors when I asked Hank a question: “It’s a pretty intimate mode of working with people, and then sharing their personal stories. Have you ever thought of your work as having a feminist ethic, in the sense that ‘the personal is political?’”

“Well,” he said, “when you put it like that, it makes sense. I would say yes. You know, I’ve said no when I’ve been asked that in the past.”

In many ways, a feminist ethic is at the basis of the personal storytelling turns in communication, in particular in the work of my mentor Carolyn Ellis (Ellis, Adams, &

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32 I speak here in the sense that one can cultivate affinity for all life and people, especially the life and people we tend to devalue.
Bochner, 2011), and I have written about this feminist ethos before (Patti, 2012). Ellis and this work start from personal, often feminine/feminist, standpoints. We share the particularities of our experiences with the hopes of resonating with others—across universes of similarity and difference. Through the particularities of the stories we share, we have the potential of connecting both deeper and broader (Coles, 1989). This is what generations of students who study interactive, narrative, and autoethnographic methods have learned from mentors like Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, whether it is friendship as method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), the compass of friendship (Rawlins, 2009), relational approaches to family and narratives of coming out in an oppressive, heteronormative culture (Adams, 2011), or about the lived realities and narratives of resilience of southern black women (Boylorn, 2013). These are basic, narrative/ethnographic lessons (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Bochner, 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 1996) desperately needed in the violent, sound-bite driven world in which we live/die.

Affinity and kinship—deep affection and loving another as family—these are the simple, classic lessons taught across countless religious traditions as far back as our records and stories go. Considering this, I guess I’m responding to and stumbling upon the meta-methodological/ethical motive of this work, its key term. Some would call it love (Ellis, forthcoming). Some would call it spirit or transformation (Frentz, 2009), some quality (Pirsig, 1974), some compassion (Chodron, 1997). It is at the root of human storytelling or myth (Campbell, 1981; Fisher, 1989). These are motives which undergird the embodied praxis and messiness of telling relational (her)stories, even as a “him” writing. Approaching scholarship with such a personal ethic can help us as ethnographers to cultivate wider senses of affinity and kinship, it can broaden our identification in
radical ways, as embodied interactors: as scholars and professors; as mentors and researchers; as partners, friends, families, and even strangers.

I am reminded of the first lesson I learned in ethnography from my first academic mentor Marc Rich (personal communication, March 1, 2006). He gave our performance ethnography class a lesson in “putting on our ethnographer’s cap.” By this I took it that he meant for us to cultivate the ability to appreciate—have affinity for—whatever is going on, at multiple levels. To be there and be aware. He subtly showed us how to practice a kind of ethnographic meta-awareness of even uncomfortable or difficult situations and stories. (He used the example of putting on our ethnographer’s cap to help us become more aware of an awkward Thanksgiving dinner with family.) To me this level of affinity for life is an act of mindful awareness. Affinity and kinship—appreciating what is and understanding at deeper levels our complex, interconnected relationship with all—are generative terms and pragmatic methodological tools I used and developed in my work with Sonia and others. They offer new possibilities (Poulos, 2006; Haraway, 2004; Kierkegaard, 1980) in a violent world—possibilities of opening new stories and relationships and possibilities for other researchers interested in the dialogic particulars of individual lives and in life itself. These are valuative, narrative modes of research (Bochner, 2001) about how to live in better accord with what is. These are motives in accord with Sonia and Sala, wisdom and peace.

As a whole, I am left with great affinity for Sonia and the time she spent with me. I am proud to share so many details from her stories and believe it provides a base for the theoretical, philosophical, ethical, and methodological ideas that are only beginning to emerge from my work and which I explore in the final chapter of this dissertation.
Beyond that, I think this personal story stands as a record of Sonia’s familial history and what she wanted to share. I am reminded of Sonia’s mother’s words: “Don’t forget.” In the relational, compassionate, and ethnographic sense of remembering shown here, this chapter is itself a material-symbolic artifact, an archive (Patti, 2009), of the story of the Wasserberger family during the Holocaust. I hope that Sonia and her family find it meaningful, and I hope I lived up to my promise to them—to write a story of her family’s story and our time together that they might use and share.

At a broader level, I hope this story of a family during the Holocaust—and a survivor telling her story sixty years later to a communication scholar interested in compassion—speaks to the collective kinship and affinity we all share as beings who attempt to make sense of the senseless and humanize the inhumane. I wish for this story to speak to and suggest the affinity and kinship that are cultivated and generated through all sorts of relational acts of compassionate storytelling.

To me the process of connecting through storytelling hints at a shift that we desperately need to make as a species, a shift away from ignoring, demonizing, and dehumanizing “others” and toward familiarizing ourselves with the great diversity of experiences that connect us. I am arguing that, to “really listen” to another’s story—to really take it in and make it familiar—is to connect it to one’s own story. When we do this, we come to realize the interconnections that are already there, and we make new connections as well. We begin to lose the ability to abstract ourselves from others and begin to see the affinity and kinship between us. These ideas are not novel, but we have yet to raise our consciousness to the level where we collectively keep our interconnectedness at the forefront of our lives and social structures. If we could, I
imagine there would be more peace and wisdom to go around. My best guess is that we need to listen to and tell more stories—deeper stories—in ways that show the kinship and affinity between and among our differences. Like Sonia, I too wish you (us) all the best, and I find comfort in knowing we’re not alone in this sentiment.

Figure 3.3 Sonia and Me at Biscayne
Chapter Seven:

Morals of Stories: Reflecting on and Synthesizing

Compassion, Identification, and Affinity in this Story

Morals and Insights of a Compassionate Story

“I think the moral’s the most important part, to tell the story and to tell the why.”

(Salomon Wainberg)

I refrain from generalizing theoretically about Holocaust survivors in social scientific ways, even about Jewish child survivors of the Holocaust like those I interviewed, because of the limited “sample” represented in this dissertation and because it goes against the moral of this story and the moral of the kind of in-depth, personal storytelling to which I am drawn. I theorize instead in humanistic ways, about the philosophical issues to which I was drawn and which emerged as the central themes of the stories told with three particular survivors and their closet family members. This limits me in what I can say about Holocaust survivors and the ramifications of the Holocaust. Yet, in this limitation, it also opens up new worlds of thinking with Holocaust survivors and those we research, of seeing them as having just as much authority about human experience as any social scientist or theorist. This kind of theorizing—moralizing (but not in the traditionally negative connotation of this word)—is an act of interpreting
with individuals, and interpreting “the why” (in Sal’s words) of what individuals have to say, for the purpose of creating greater insight into existential dilemmas inherent to symbol using animals, beings that “make sense” and attempt to share and co-construct experience.

How can I synthesize what been generated through the praxis of this project? To offer thoughtful, open-ended answers to this question, I am led back to the beginning, back to the research questions that informed how this dissertation unfolded and took shape. I am led back to the discussions to which I was drawn in the humanities of testimony and to the literature that shaped my understanding and approach to working compassionately with individual Holocaust survivors. I am led back to Sal Wainberg’s motive of telling his story: “Telling brings me more than relief, it washes my soul.”

Initially I asked three questions: How can we innovatively and compassionately listen to and collaborate with Holocaust survivors at the end of an era? What can we learn from collaborating, over multiple interviews and across an extended period of time, with individual Holocaust survivors? How might individual Holocaust survivor stories and acts of relational storytelling relate to broad cultural, historical exigencies in a still-violent world? By raising such unorthodox research questions my project pivoted away from legalistic, historical evidence of Holocaust survivor testimony and toward the relational, dialogic, and compassionate process of storytelling for the purpose of wisdom in its broadest sense. I am reminded of the core insight of child survivor of the Holocaust and noted Holocaust historian Saul Friedlander’s (1979) When Memory Comes: “This quest, this incessant confrontation with the past . . . has become sufficient reason in itself,
and a necessary undertaking. . . . When memory comes, knowledge comes too, little by little” (p. 182). When memory comes, so too do knowledge and wisdom.

Saul Friedlander and Sal Wainberg come to the same conclusion about the processes they went through in remembering and in their assertions about the process of how and why humans remember. I like the way Sal says it better: “The mind is like a big kettle of soup. If you dig long enough, you find the meat. . . . And that’s why I’m digging.” By engaging in the relational process of compassionate storytelling—of asking and telling, remembering and coming to terms together—we find that knowledge and wisdom that sustain us, even when the story remains all loose ends. This is not wisdom or knowledge that transcends the trauma, horror, or tragedy of the Holocaust. It is knowledge that is created through the acknowledgement and sharing of our experiences as best we can—even the acknowledgement of that which is beyond our sense-making, symbolic reaches, and abilities to tell and understand.

This reminds me again of Harvard psychologist Dr. Harry Penn’s story of surviving the Holocaust. Penn, like those I have spoken with, admitted that through his “ascent” to be able to share his story publicly, he had to confront persistent anxieties in his life and memory. He dug and climbed through the layers of his memory and was able to find new levels of existential freedom in the process, even while admitting his ascent was inherently incomplete and that his experience and memory of the Holocaust cut to his core. These stories—this dissertation—speaks to this kind of wisdom, the insight that, even when confronted with the seeming paradox of making sense of the senseless and crafting humane meaning from the remains of a void of inhumane destruction, we can
and do move forward, ascend, together, through our acts of remembering and telling in the present.

Sal Wainberg once told me that Jews who had to experience the Holocaust were “demoralized.” I suggested to him, and he agreed, that perhaps survivors who share their stories—and interactive witnesses who are willing to “really listen” to these stories—are engaging in acts of moralizing, as a way to face where we are today and move more consciously toward the future. Our basic insight ties with LaCapra’s (1998) advice, that we ought not tell Holocaust stories using convenient forms for nostalgic purposes but instead endeavor “to be attentive to the problem of history insofar as it bears upon the present and future” (p. 8). Rosenthal (2006) comes to a similar conclusion, that by focusing on survivors’ histories in addition to their present reconstructions, we realize that indeed that the past is constituted in the present act of storytelling and narration. Our present acts of storytelling about the past orient us toward the future, a future that, if we learn our lessons, has the possibility of being less horrific than the present or past.

Building from the perspectives of Assmann (2006), Hartman (2006), Kraft (2006), and Kushner (2006), I have made a conscious effort to view the stories of Holocaust survivors as more than historical sound bites or evidence of the atrocities and have heard and told more of the phenomenological intricacies of each survivor’s experience living with and telling his or her story. This approach led to much more complex, detailed, and holistic treatment of the experiences, memories, and storytelling processes involved with “really listening” to and sharing individual Holocaust survivor stories, which I think is a perspective needed as we near the end of the era in which we
will be able to speak with first-hand survivors of the *Shoah*, especially considering the lack of this kind of work with Holocaust survivors (Greenspan & Bolkosky, 2006).

Bolstering Witzum’s & Malkinson’s (2009) argument, this project shows that by taking seriously the creative expressions of individual survivors from a time-distancing perspective, we add to our understanding of the individual and collective processes characterized by coming to terms with suffering. In particular, I have learned more concretely how these processes are always-ongoing, contingent, and relational and that—by framing this as a project about *storytelling* and not *testimony*—we see the creative and collective acts that are involved in any individual recounting the past. We learn of the patience and compassion needed to evoke and hear unique stories of survivors, stories that they might not have told if they didn’t have an audience and an engaged listener.

I guess the point I’m making here is that, when working compassionately with individuals, I’ve learned that it’s better to be like Barbara Walters than like a traditional scholar or researcher. Teaching this method in my classes, my students too have come to the conclusion that there is a big difference between compassionate interviewing and the usual rules, methods, and results of how to do a formal, scholarly interview.

At the same time, I am left reflecting on the contradictions inherent to storytelling, particularly Holocaust storytelling, and the loss and forgetting they entail. This reminds me of Sonia’s phrase, “Don’t forget so-and-so.” Here I have learned that, as limited human beings in an ephemeral world, we can (and it is still important to) construct stories out of absence and lost details. Even in the vast space of lost stories that make up the Holocaust universe, there are still fragments of meaningful debris and planets of memory to explore and chart. Even in forgetting the name of “so-and-so,” we
are voicing our yearning to remember and to know more, and we are remembering that we are forgetting. Since there is no stopping the forces of time and forgetting, each act of remembering and sharing is a radical one that helps connect and capture for a moment meaning in motion. Storytelling helps our stories to be communicated and passed on, at least for a bit longer and in always-new ways. Storytelling is an act of love, communion, and connection. This is what I hear Bruce Springsteen (2007) saying when he sings: “Love is a power greater than death, just like the songs and stories told.” In stories our voices and memories—loved ones, idols, and demons—live on in translated, appropriated forms.

There are many other contradictions that I have become aware of through this project, all which I address with the same “answer.” Contradictions of life, death, and the Holocaust are often impossible to overcome and are not meant to be surmounted, they are meant to be appreciated, negotiated, and grappled with. I think, for example, of the advice Manuel’s psychologist gave him: “Your ability to intellectualize is your best defense mechanism.” This is a contradiction with which we all must contend, as sense-makers—professional intellectualizes specifically. A dissertation on compassionate storytelling with Holocaust survivors is an act of intellectualizing and a defense mechanism against the vast unknowability of life on a genocidal planet. As academics we have a bias toward meaning, reflection, and introspection. But, again as Manuel taught me, we have these defense mechanisms for a reason, and they can be used productively to help us cope with the struggles of life and death inherent to the universe as we know (and mostly don’t know) it. We can recognize that there are limits to know and that, in
knowing, we are always unknowing, silencing, missing the point, and committing acts of conscious and unconscious symbolic violence.

As Greenspan (2010) points out, dwelling in the complex contradictions and antitheses of life as lived is not an easy task, and we tend to stick with what we already know and categorize based on discrete, rational(ized), (in)coherent logics. By talking with Manuel about the contradictions of life and death, compassion and rage, identification and division that happened simultaneously, I have attempted to not settle or figure out these contradictions but instead steep in the ambiguity that exists in expressing and identifying with both sides of these and other dialectics. In that sense I am challenging myself and others to broaden our frames and abilities to identify and to resist the urge to come to a right answer or final synthesis.

This anti-conclusion is the result of personalizing information and stories, of taking them to heart and allowing and acknowledging the messy grey area of life and storytelling. This is related to Burke’s (1950) advice about how to avoid the dehumanizing, abstract, scientific logic he sees as underlying divisive, unconsciously genocidal logics. As a collective, we still have failed to identify with and personalize others and the world around us. We still live on a fictionally divided planet at war. In Manuel’s words, people still need to know about “man’s [sic] inhumanity to man.” We have not learned these basic lessons and today millions of human beings (as well as other animals, plants, and the planet itself) still suffer unnecessarily because of it.

Which brings me to Sonia and Sala—peace and wisdom—and the lessons I learned from speaking with Mrs. Wasserberger. I have learned that even a single individual speaks with multiple voices and that, through weaving together history,
memory, experience, and compassionate relationships we are able to craft more complex and explicitly relational and contextual stories that connect individual, familial histories to broader histories of the larger human family of which we are all a part. This is a process, as Haraway (2004) argues, of learning “how to inhabit stories rather than deny them. . . how to critically live both inherited and novel kinships . . . how to build ongoing stories rather than histories that end” (p. 1).

When speaking with Sonia, Sal, and Manuel, I connected with each of them based on my own family and history. In each chapter we see how I relate the experience of continuing to come to terms with my father’s death from cancer to the motives that push me to tell and hear personal stories of suffering. And, even though having a father die of cancer is universes away from being a child survivor of the Holocaust, I believe that each survivor appreciated my story, as well as understood how it gave me the sensibilities to hear deeply what they had to share. I related to them through my own vastly different experience of suffering. In fact, moments after I defended my dissertation, while standing in the hall and waiting for the verdict from my committee, Sandy Wainberg gave me a big hug and said, “It was because you shared your story with us that made you more than a researcher. It made you family. And that’s why we’re here today, as family.”

Like Sonia and I say about the “rich lawyer in New York,” even that guy is suffering and often in ways more subtle than a “poor kid in Cambodia.” I believe it is this thought that influences Sonia and me to “wish you all the best,” no matter who you are or what your background is. Sonia might link this sentiment to her Jewish faith; I might link it to my Buddhist philosophy or belief in the deepest sense of mythic storytelling. To me it doesn’t matter where we trace our lineages or beliefs, what matters is that we listen
with compassion and understand that we’re all in this together and we all suffer. To not wish someone the best is, I believe, to symbolically wound and limit ourselves. As a practice this belief is challenging at a moment-by-moment, everyday level, yet it’s one worth keeping in mind. It’s the moral of Sonia’s and my story and one of the morals of this dissertation. It’s one of the morals of stories and storytelling more generally too.

These are the hard-wrought answers I have come up with after reflecting on and representing my time spent listening with individual Holocaust survivors. Like Langer and Greenspan, I am not arguing that Holocaust survivors’ stories are the only way to approach understanding the Holocaust. What I hope I have demonstrated, however, is the unique place they hold in humanizing the inhumane and what a compassionate approach to collaborating with survivors—and human beings generally—has to offer.

In many ways the conversations I had with survivors and the stories here are quite simple and spontaneous, a lot like everyday conversations. This is because, like Saul Friedlander (1979), I too believe that “the simplest passages . . . were perhaps those that bore the most powerful messages, that were infused with the most intense poetry” (p. 12). I hope, as Burke (1950) advises, that I have put in the “sustained rhetorical effort, backed by the imagery of a richly humane and spontaneous poetry” (p. 34) to help readers to “fully sympathize with people in circumstances greatly different from our own” (p. 34). At least this is the potential of compassionate storytelling and of taking the subjectivities, experiences, memories, histories, and relational processes involved in listening to and ethnographically representing others seriously. And, regardless of where this project goes from here, I feel like it was a success because of the relationships formed and the meaning we shared together.
After moments of sitting silently on the verge of tears I breathe deeply. I hear Sal’s voice and the tears fall: “Chris, I will be at peace if I feel one person has really listened, has really tried to understand. You have.”

Maybe Sal’s right. But I still feel like I’m only beginning to understand. I will continue trying for as long as I can. I owe it to Sal. I owe it to him to live up to his understanding of me and what I was trying—and continue to try—to do.

From the Heart/Spirit

When I reflect on the implications of each chapter and the work as a whole there are many additional levels of insights I’d like to explore. The first is the most basic and radical at the same time: focusing on the cultivation of humane humanity is rare in the world in which we live, especially in the academy. Again I am reminded of an email exchange with Hank Greenspan. We were talking back and forth as Hank gave me advice on revising my Sal Wainberg chapter. He has been a big supporter of me and my work with Holocaust survivors, and I take this as a great compliment and positive sign for the future of this project, seeing Greenspan as the foremost authority on genuine, intimate, organic, intuitive, and long-term relational interviewing with Holocaust survivors. Hank (H. Greenspan, personal communication, January 6, 2013) said of “our” style of work: “So much of these issues come down to demonstrating the humanely obvious, but since when did academia have much truck with the humanely obvious?” He also called demonstrating the humanely obvious in the academy a “Sisyphean battle.” Thankfully, I am in an open discipline and have been encouraged to lead with (my) heart and lead with

33 I’m not alone here. Kushner (2006) gives a good example of a similar compliment to Hank’s work.
stories (Behar, 1996; Bochner, 2011; Ellis, 2007; Frank, 1995)—to lead with the
humanely obvious. The moral of the story, as narrative theorists have shown so well in
the past decade, is that we can use personal storytelling as an empathic method of
scholarly engagement and representation (Bochner, 2001; Freeman, 2004; Jackson,
1995). Working with individuals involves ethically/morally charged performances and
the choice to focus on the stories of three Holocaust survivors and call it a dissertation is
a political choice that foregrounds life and death, love and loss, individual and relational
experience, memory and forgetting, rage and compassion, identification and affinity,
family histories and kinship beyond bloodlines and bloodlands.

**Compassionate Ethnography: Three Key Themes**

The next levels of insight I have come to see as an implication of this work are the
three main cross-cutting and overlapping themes of this dissertation: compassion,
identification, and affinity. Each one of these themes compliments and adds to the others.
Compassion brings in and ties together Eastern and Western notions. From Buddhism
and other ancient contemplative traditions (Chodron, 1997) to contemporary medicine,
psychology, and neuroscience (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Hanson & Mendisu, 2009), the
cultivation of compassion is at the root of storytelling, human connection, consciousness,
and communication, and the potential wisdom of human beings and human culture.
Curiously, like working with Holocaust survivors, compassion as I am using it here is a
world and practice that has been largely absent from communication scholarship. This is
even stranger when you think of the common prefix[^34]: com. Compassion—suffering with
as best we can while knowing we can never know (Patti, 2012)—is a key to really

[^34]: My thanks to Rachel Rivlin for clarifying this for me. I mentioned to her that communication and
compassion have the same root, com, and she corrected me—they have the same prefix.
listening to another as well as a key to fully realizing our own humanity and getting out of this ten-thousand-year phase of war and violence as a global human culture.

Identification is another dynamic term and it connects to compassion while also highlighting the dangers of division. Identification foregrounds the ongoing struggles of “us” and “them” that happen at collective levels and also happen moment-to-moment in our everyday lives—even, for example, when we choose to “like” something on Facebook and not something else. Employing identification as Burke conceptualizes it—as a dynamic, key term—helps us to become more aware of the groups with whom we identify and those we (often unconsciously) devalue. We can see identification as something humans do—like storytelling—and work to reflect on and widen our capacities for practicing identification. I am reminded of one of Hushpupy’s realizations, the lead character from the 2012 film Beasts of the Southern Wild (Carroll et al. & Zeitlin): Hushpuppy: “I see that I am a little piece of a big, big universe.”

As I understand identification and use it to understand my time with Manuel, this is what I have learned. We all struggle with good and evil, life and death, “us” and “them,” and so, even while it is easy for me to identify with Manuel about feeling murderous rage and wanting to kill Nazis, I know, at a deep level, that we are all in this together. Coming to this realization helps me to live better with the contradictions and antitheses in my life and in the lives and stories of those with whom I relate. Additionally, identification represents what I would call an alter-modern concept that has survived the fracturing and erosion of post-modern critical theory, making it a particularly relevant tool today. Last, identification and Kenneth Burke are most commonly associated with the study of texts and rhetoric in the field of communication.
As an ethnographer, my use of Burke helps to connect and cultivate one of the rich “prospects” between rhetoric and ethnography (Payne, 2006)—critical theories and embodied praxis—a nexus central to communication studies.

Affinity is the third foundation of the trinity of themes that have emerged in this work and acts as a necessary counterpoint to the other two themes. As I use it to understand my relationship with Sonia, affinity is a feminist standpoint that focuses on broadening our affection and kinship, broadening our identification and compassion for all others. Donna Haraway’s (2004) use of the term helps me to, like Burke, focus on avoiding the dangers of failing to realize our interconnection and affection for others due to accepted and oppressive socially constructed ideologies of our time (in particular objectivist, Western, and traditionally patriarchal logics).

Haraway’s ethic of creating feminist figures and telling stories of “elsewhere” (p. 1) with these figures—places we have yet to realize, imagine, and construct together as human beings—helps to justify the radical ethos I attempt to champion with those I speak and write. (And just talk to my closest friends or students if you think I only write about this stuff [see Patti & Ellis, 2013, for example, for how this thinking manifests in an ethnographic pedagogical writing activity]). Even with my failings, even with the unconscious violence potentially done by this or any text, even as a “man” writing from a feminist standpoint, affinity challenges me to go beyond what might seem possible in my own mind and in the culture in which I am embedded. It calls me to personal stories that contribute to the collective quest to write and live more livable stories, worlds, and lives together. Affinity is also a main connection between my mentor and me and the tradition of evocative, autoethnographic storytelling.
Methodologically Speaking

At methodological and practical levels, I am left reflecting on the choices I have made from the beginning of this project—how I went about actually doing it. As the work of Ellis (2004, 2008) and Cissna and Anderson (2002) advise, the method of this work was emergent and developed with each interview, each relationship, and each attempt to write and make sense. At each stage, from my first interview with Holocaust survivor Nathan Snyder for the USF/FHM project to my last conversation with Sonia, I have always erred on the side of the relationship I was forming with an individual, rather than on any *a priori* rules, guidelines, or scripts of what I was supposed to ask or how I was supposed to interact. There are drawbacks to this mode of scholarship for sure. It’s messy, for one. It’s unpredictable, and it’s not the most historically, psychologically, or theoretically informed mode to go about a project. It’s an experiment, which, I believe, is one of the reasons why “hard scientists” have always seemed to understand my project when I have talked to them about it (much more so than your average social scientist).

When I got to the level of “writing” results of the “data” I had generated, however, my experiment stalled. I tried for a year or so to write the novelistic, literary stories I aspired to and imagined in my dissertation proposal, but none of these stories ever flew. Each one crashed as I tried to “invent” and “add vivid detail” or “plot and character devises” to the stories I had written. I knew standard methods of data analysis would not work for me either. I knew even grounded theory would not get me where I wanted to go. But I was unable to render the powerful stories I wanted to write. I ended up having to let go of the idea that I would be able to know all the details and write
novelistic stories of my time with survivors, at least at this point in my process. I gave in to my limitations and went back to my roots—representing dialogue.

When I finally made this transition things changed. I felt empowered to write because I felt I was doing some kind of justice to the words and voices I had heard. I felt there was a critical ethnographic ethic to using large portions of our conversational dialogues, that it got readers closer to the sometimes challenging, sometimes tedious, often messy, but “real” and “rich” heart of “what happened” between me and survivors. Foregrounding interpersonal dialogue also requires, I believe, a commitment on the reader’s part to read with our stories, to take the time to take in the many layers and wrinkles of our stories. It’s not always an easy read or a fun read—and I like that. Listening and dialogue are hard and complex (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004), especially when the subject is life before, during, and since the Holocaust. Adopting this approach also helped me feel that I was staying true to the unique voices of each person I worked with, and it created an archive of stories which I will continue to explore, expand, and use for years to come. Most importantly, as I wrote and re-wrote, I felt I could still hear Sal and Sandy in the dialogue. I felt readers could hear Manuel and Rachel and sense the tenor of their and our relationship. I felt that we could here Sonia’s voice in its complexity and ambiguity.

Further, working dialogically and writing dialogue linked me to the work of Cissna and Anderson (2002, 2004) and the growing body of practitioners and interpreters of dialogue in interpersonal communication. Even as a recognized and important field of study in communication, Cissna and Anderson (2004) note that like contemporary society
generally, “our field has too few examples of sustained, collaborative, critical research projects” (p. 206) which focus on the praxis of dialogue.

I was drawn to perform my own embodied and textual version of Cissna and Anderson’s (2002) idea of (anti)methods. Using the classic Martin Buber and Carl Rogers dialogue as their case, Cissna and Anderson (2002) suggest that a scholarly sensitivity to dialogue depends on methods that are fundamentally emergent and on the importance of co-authorship at multiple levels. Trying to demonstrate this, I attempted to allow the dialogues themselves to dictate the method of representation and structure of each chapter, and I explain in the next section how this happened differently, developed, and changed form with each survivor and story.

Thanks to Buber and others, the human sciences have learned that dialogue is a particular quality of relating, “one that sparks in those moments when communicators most fully realize their relationships” (Cissna & Anderson, 2002, p. 17). Building on Buber’s, Rogers’, and Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue, Burkean rhetoric, and symbolic interaction, Cissna and Anderson (2002) claim “it is toward conversational texts, then, that we turn in order to glimpse the protean potential of rhetoric” (p. 20). Dialogue, they explain, is “coexperiential and collaborative rhetoric, open rhetoric, expansive rhetoric, constitutive rhetoric, and paradoxically perhaps, radically traditional rhetoric” (p. 22). Theorizing dialogue, Cissna and Anderson (2002) turn to one of my ethical heroes, Paolo Friere: “Dialogue is an awakening of other-awareness that occurs in, and through, a moment of meeting. This has surprisingly broad implications for human communication” (p. 174). Synchronously, Cissna and Anderson (2002) summarize key dialogic lessons for human communication I take from listening with Holocaust survivors:
…Inequalities do not preclude moments of surprising mutuality in which each party experiences the present encounter in a way that transcends their roles. At that moment, and in a sense only for that moment, dialogue levels the communicative field. Such a presence, however fleeting, exhibits a potential for future change that energizes future communication. (p. 186)

I have attempted to show these kinds of dialogic moments of meeting in different ways in each of the content chapters of this dissertation.

It is also my belief that we can cultivate the ability to relate dialogically with others in order to sustain moments of intimate dialogic meeting in our lives, pedagogy, and research. This is what makes me an interpersonal ethnographer of communication, my focus on the power and potential of real dialogue and personal narratives (Bochner & Ellis, 1992). This is what I tried to manifest with those with whom I worked, and I tried to demonstrate it in the writing itself. This is something I think is relevant to ethnographers, communication scholars, and the broader world. This is relevant to the Holocaust survivors with whom I have worked and is what continues to sustain our relationships today.

**Sal, Manuel, and Sonia: Emergent Methods in Three Acts**

Before I get to the concluding moral(s) of this story, I wish to elaborate on how the emergent process and structure of each content chapter of this work happened. My relationship with Sal and Sandy Wainberg was the first “collaborative” relationship I formed for this project. I was overwhelmed by the power of Sal’s words, by the depth of his and Sandy’s relationship, and by his unending quest to know more about his own
experience through telling his story. Because of all these factors, I connected deeply with Sal and Sandy and felt we needed to engage in more in-depth interviews.

As Sal became ill, I knew I needed to work with him as much as I could and process his interviews first. This led to a mountain of qualitative data and ethnographic experience that could have been a dissertation unto itself (and from which I hope to write a book). As Dr. Ellis will attest, I spent a year processing our interviews, transcribing and categorizing each moment into a complex, interconnected matrix of thirty-four themes (see appendix A), each with many moments of supporting dialogic exemplars and evidence. I titled this: “map (distillation [story board {“the meat”}]) of themes with Sal.” This map was the key to the two hundred pages of verbatim dialogue I had written. Dr. Ellis gave me some sage advice after reviewing this writing. She told me that it was some of the best ethnographic work she had seen from a student and that it was beyond what could be contained in a dissertation: “You can’t have a two-hundred page chapter,” I believe were her words. Following her advice freed me again, this time to distill even further our interactions into five key themes from our conversations, leaving out the vast majority of what we had shared in order to share more meaningfully what was needed for this project. Doing so has allowed me to share the heart of my time with Sal and also save so much for later use.

Next I connected with Manuel and Rachel and we formed a similarly close yet very different relationship than my relationship with Sal and Sandy. Manuel and Rachel were younger and we were on the same intellectual, political, and aesthetic wavelength. Our time together led to a similar process of multiple casual, conversational interviews as well as a similar process of transcribing and processing most every moment form these
interviews. Because I was able to interview Manuel for the USF/FHM project (unlike Sal, who was interviewed initially by Dr. Ellis), I had more of his formal history to work with and we had an immediate connection due to the emotionally and historically charged atmosphere of our first formal interview. From here, instead of mapping out every moment from our exchanges, I tried to map only the moments I thought I would need for the dissertation. This led to over one hundred pages of dialogue, then to sixty, then to forty, then to thirty. I stripped out repetitive interactions or tangents that complicated the telling of the story which I felt compelled to tell and which I interpreted as our main theme. I found an organic way to structure and thematize our conversations based on our compassion/rage (identification/division). I was able to include much more of the details of our conversations than with Sal because of the nature of our conversation and the fact that I had relatively fewer data to deal with.

Then came my connection with Sonia. Our USF/FHM interview and pre-interview before enamored us to each other. I was drawn to her complicated history and to the challenges we faced when talking with each other, specifically her fluent yet unique mastery of English, which made her uncomfortable at first grappling with the often abstract, open-ended, introspective, spontaneous, and double/triple questions I tend to ask in interviews. Our affinity for each other and her gratitude that someone wanted to listen to and write her family story made our meetings heartfelt and beautiful. Yet, I knew I could not go as far as I did with Sal and Manuel in terms of collaborative interpretation (and sensed she did not want to and would not find this all that interesting or meaningful).
After our first audio-recorded conversational interview I knew that I had what I needed for this project and knew that she and I would meet again as friends. Because of the particular nature of our relationship and conversations, I felt that I did not need to record our later interviews, meetings, and interactions and instead allowed our friendship to grow organically. I felt it would be forced to try and develop the kind of interactive, analytical conversations that emerged with Sal and Sandy, Manuel and Rachel. I wanted my relationship with Sonia to dictate the best course of (inter)action.

In her story, therefore, I focused on telling, in as coherent and honest a way I could, her family’s story as she knows it. I saw this as valuable familial oral history and something both she and her daughter Marilyn were seeking. Because of our limited number of recorded interviews, I was able to share much of what was said between us, making it a good fit for a dissertation chapter that I hope to develop into an article. With Sonia I tried to interweave and highlight our affection for each other and the relational nature of our conversations while telling a collaborative and layered version of the extraordinary journey she and her family took during the Holocaust.

All three of these chapters, and the methods that unfolded, are brought together through the praxis of compassionate storytelling. This project is untraditional as social scientific research in the sense that it is personally historical and that those I work with wanted to be identified and tied to their stories. This lack of anonymity was something I had to work out in my initial research design for the Institutional Review Board, and I have Carolyn Ellis and Ken Cissna to thank for helping me make the argument to keep this data as part of the public historical record of experiences of identified Holocaust
survivors. I also have each participant to thank for wanting to be identified in this research.

The moral of the story here is that compassionate storytelling can be used as: a) a method of engaging survivors of mass atrocities and others; b) a rich theoretical and philosophical lens with which to view human communication and the struggle for meaning in the post-Holocaust world; c) a powerful, ethically and aesthetically charged mode of communicating personal and collective stories across areas of difference, creating deep identification and a relational sense of connection with others; d) a critical ethnographic approach to communication that can be relevantly applied to the practice of oral history. While these ideas are not entirely new or revolutionary, I believe they represent the particular—radically basic yet desperately needed—insights of my time spent talking with and listening to individual Holocaust survivors. These simple dialogic, narrative insights are often overlooked today and better appreciation of them might be of great benefit in such a violent, divided, chaotic world.

Confessions of a (Non)Jewish Storyteller

“Why were human beings created?” goes the classic Jewish saying, a saying Jewish folklorist Steven Zeitlin (1997, p. 1) gives credit to Elie Wiesel for first telling him. The answer: “Because God loves stories.” In many ways, this is a dissertation built on the millenniums-long tradition of Jewish storytelling, spoken through the bodies, experiences, and voices of three Jewish Holocaust survivors in particular. Ironically though, this is also a dissertation that is not about Jewish history. It comes from the standpoint of a middle-class Italian/Irish/Puerto Rican/other “dude,” born and raised in Southern California in the 1980s and ’90s, who is a self-proclaimed “pan-mythic,
agnostic Buddhist,” and who uses ethnographic methods, oral history, and his study of communication to guide him. One of the biggest limitations to this story is my lack of knowledge of the vast worlds and histories of Jewish tradition and storytelling (in addition to my lack of knowledge of the vast world of what it knowable).

Like so many Holocaust stories before, it is built around voids and omissions, built on the ruins of memory (Langer, 1991), a story made of gaps, black holes, unknowability, and conscious and unconscious erasures. It is also a story built from only a fraction of the three and a half years of conversations I have engaged in.

While I may not be a Jewish storyteller, I am inspired by and have great respect for the Jewish storytelling tradition, and I have done my best to hear and represent the very different Jewish and non-Jewish standpoints of each survivor with whom I have worked, be they orthodox, “unorthodox,” atheist, or agnostic. I have tried to show how each of their backgrounds and unique lives factor into their very different stories and identities. Further, I am a storyteller at heart who has been drawn to the broadest themes of human storytelling for as long as I can remember. I have delighted in hearing a telling a good stories since I was a young boy. One vivid example comes to mind. I recall telling ghost stories with my father and brother when I was maybe nine years old, sitting around a campfire on a cool, clear, black night. The stars twinkled dimly beyond the amber glow of the roaring fire. We were camping on Catalina Island, or maybe we were in the desert, near California’s Calico Ghost Town or Joshua Tree National Park.

As I have alluded to throughout, other factors influence the motives and shape of this story as well. Parallel to my study of communication and emersion in storytelling, I have read and practiced the stories of Buddhists since 2003 (Batchelor, 1998; Hanh,
I have been infatuated with literary theory and the limits and possibilities of Western myth and rhetoric (Burke, 1974; Campbell, 1981; Pirsig, 1974). As an ethnographer, I heard, recorded, and performed the verbatim voices of a cancer support group (Patti, 2007). These experiences and influences led me 2,500 miles across the United States to the University of South Florida, to follow my affinity for the work of Carolyn Ellis.

My journey has allowed me to tell family stories, particularly the stories of my mother’s abuse and difficult childhood (Patti, 2010), my relationship with my brother (paper written for Carolyn Ellis’s Fall 2010 doctoral seminar in Autoethnography), and my father’s mythic life, influence, and early death (Patti, 2009, 2012). Throughout the process of interviewing the three Holocaust survivors with whom I have been honored to speak, I have been interested in “big” questions and “big” stories of life and death (Goodall, 2000) as seen through the lenses of “small” stories (Bamberg, 2006, 2012; Bamberg & Marchman, 2009), of personal stories as acts of relational meaning (Bochner, 2012). The quirks of my history, experience, and consciousness give me unique sensibilities and motivate me to ask the impossible questions I ask. They both facilitate and limit how I listen to and tell the stories contained in this dissertation as a (non)Jewish storyteller.

Many of the implication of this project have been deeply personal. As I admit in different ways to each person I have interviewed, listening with Sal, Sandy, Manuel, Rachel, and Sonia has forced me to confront my own problems and edges. This project has challenged me to grow and mature as a human being, in order to get to this point, deal with these stories, and produce this document. I have taken years to process the limited
number of interviews I have done—it has taken me years to make any sense of this work. I have felt overwhelmed with the humanity and inhumanity of it all. I have tried my best to take in the stories I hear as deeply and personally as I can while also taking care of myself. But it has taken time and is still an ongoing process. I will take a lifetime trying making sense of the life and death I’ve been honored to hear, and even then I know there will be no final solution.

A Storytelling Manifesto

Haraway (2004) has a manifesto for feminist cyborgs (p. 7-45). Well, this is my manifesto for post-Holocaust, post-post-modern storytellers. It is one based on doing the humanely obvious by slowing down and “really” listening to each other, by erring on the side of particularity, by focusing on cultivating dialogic quality in-and-through communication and relationships, by sharing our own stories together, by highlighting the wisdom of cultivating compassion (and understanding more of the connections between individuals) through storytelling, by unpacking how and why we identify and the limits and possibilities of doing so, by focusing on widening our affinities and kinships, and by centralizing specifics, contexts, reflexivity, and the ethics of working with sensitive stories, like those of Holocaust survivors at the end of an era (and at the end of life). I hope this is a manifesto others might be inspired by and adopt—in their own ways—in and beyond the field of communication.

I think my project highlights what a compassionate, ethnographic, communication-oriented approach to interviewing brings to working with Holocaust survivors and oral history. It is a product of and reaction to growing up in a world dominated by frantic isolation, separation, anxiety, and superficial yet powerful
emphases on difference (political, economic, “racial,” religious, nation state, etc.). I see the move to highlight individual experiences, boundary-crossing relationships, and stories of suffering/meaning as one that speaks to larger and older human stories and struggles as we face the present and an uncertain future.

I have asked the survivors I have worked with to help me grapple with the classic humanist exigency of how to live meaningful, compassionate lives in the face of chaos and suffering. In so doing, I have seen them as human beings rich with wisdom and insights worthy of hearing and sharing. I believe they offer unique glimpses into human experience and into the process of telling stories about experience. This is a humane ethnographic ethic that others could adopt as well; it is an ethic to tell dialogic stories with unique individuals for the purpose of cultivating wisdom, peace, and compassion.

Of course, as I have also tried to show, every history and story has the potential to do symbolic violence. Telling one story implies the infinite others that could have been told, or have yet to be told, and/or never will be told or heard. Stories both personal and collective highlight certain aspects while effacing others (Rushing & Frentz, 1995). Writing stories and histories are always partial, political processes and acts, and that is why explicitly exposing and considering morality is central to this story. So while this is a loaded, possibly risky act, so too are silence, inaction, and choosing not to do this work (Zinn, 1994). In many ways, however, any project that works with Holocaust survivors, any project that works with vulnerable stories and with human beings, must consider the dangers inherent to living, relating, and telling stories. I’ve done my best to expose and be explicit about my motive and limitations, and I know there are oceans of erasure, errors, and issues with what I have been able to do.
Outside all the dangers and limitations are the potential benefits of this work. I have had the chance to work innovatively and intimately with Holocaust survivors at the end of the era in which scholars will be able to do so. I have had the privilege of working with complex, peaceful, and wise human beings who wish to share their stories with me and anyone willing to listen. And this all gives me an intense sense of hope for the possibilities of individual and collective insights that come from acting together.

We have the chance to add personal, phenomenological, and philosophical nuances to the ongoing story of story-ing human experience. We have the chance to better understand how we come to terms with suffering and with experiences that challenge the human symbolic capacity to understand, remember, recount, and record. We have the chance to share meaningful moments together in conversation and to explore these moments and stories as best we can in the time that we have. We have the chance to live peacefully, compassionately together in the present moment while considering the violence of the past with the hope of imagining a better future. That’s the moral of a storytelling manifesto.

**Remembering Lives and Deaths on Yom HaShoah**

As I conclude my dissertation and attempt to synthesize the theoretical, methodological, ethical, and personal implications of this work I am struck by today’s date—April 8, 2013—*Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day. I am brought back to the basic value of these stories. This is a work dedicated to the historical, cultural, and personal value of listening with individual Holocaust survivors. It is an act of compassionate storytelling and stands as a particular record of experiences at the edge of the Holocaust universe. In different ways Sal, Manuel, and Sonia have in the past been
disavowed as Holocaust survivors worthy of having stories to share. Sal didn’t have “a number,” Manuel was born at the edges of the Holocaust, and Sonia felt that as a child refugee, she didn’t have a common language to talk with other, older camp survivors.

My wish is to add their and our voices to the public record for the purpose of remembrance. In particular, I offer this as an act of com-memoration that speaks in silence of all the lives and stories that remain untold and unremembered. I offer the (his/her)stories of three survivors and our dialogue together as a small token, a symbolic appropriation (to use Sal’s formulation), which suggests the interconnections between their stories, the stories of their families, the story of Holocaust survivors, and the story of human life on a planet caught between ongoing genocide and the hope of peace.

This story ties me to those I have spoken with. It ties them to those they have lost. I hope these stories make new connections and ties with your lives and stories. Then you too can remember by making our stories your own. Last, I hope it encourages others to share as openly and best they can their own and others’ stories. In this way we can act compassionately together in the dialogic, relational process of storytelling, as beings that are part of the uniquely human and ongoing quest to communicate and come to terms with life in the face death, even while still unsettled in the wake of the Holocaust.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Map of Themes of Work with Sal Wainberg

Map (distillation [story board {“the meat”}]) of themes with Sal

1. Beginning: I tell him about my hopes and process and ask if it makes sense. Sal wisely says he’ll see as it progresses but he’s willing.
   a. We reflect on Sal’s previous interviews and interview experiences: Shoah: FHM/USF/Ellis.
      i. Here’s the transcript of this (process notes, p. 8).
      ii. 10:15 into second interview Sal talks about the difference between Carolyn’s “homey” feeling and Shoah formality.
   b. Process notes: Sandy and I connect immediately (p. 1 Sandy). I explain the process. They are so patient with me and willing. I do a good job of being transparent and telling them what I’m looking for.
   c. Sal walks in—off to a curious start;) Nice scene here in process notes. (Sal’s breathing tells the tale)
   d. We’re in the “getting to know each other” phase in the first interview. I repeat my goals again and again.
   e. “No pressure to get it right” (process notes)
   g. More framing by me: my interests not history—more mixing feeling.
      i. Sandy’s take on feeling: “Chronological, dry, no feeling whatsoever. No insights, no feeling, no.” (Also 9i: p. 7 Sandy)
   h. At dinner with Carolyn—we talk about method, Greenspan, and Lessons and Legacies.
   i. Beginning of second-to-last interview with Sal, I tell him the structure I’m thinking about (three-tiered stories): Great interaction:
      i. Sal: “I think that’s [the moral] the most important part.” Me: “Me too. Me too.” Me: “Does that sound like an OK structure to you?” Sal: “No, I think it’s an ideal structure, I really think so because it tells the story and it tells the why, which is…” (ALSO TIED TO THEME 26—the “WHY”) (p. 20 of process notes: KEY)
   k. Sandy acts as the interviewer a lot, helps me out, she’s interested too—likes where we’re going: good example of this at 22:30 of second interview.
      i. Sandy is good at adding to the story and picking up where I’m going (32:50 second interview). She synthesizes and ties thing together for us. She gives Sal a break.
2. Sal goes straight to showing though his experience **narrative theory at work:**
telling gets easier, he learns through the process of telling, remembers as he tells.
Co-constructs his memory based on questions asked and people asking. Needs a
genuine listener to hear what it is he has to say.
   a. One of Sal’s central motives is in there: “some preaching”
      i. At Thai dinner, 1:30:00—we talk more about this.
   b. Sal’s dedicated his life to sharing his experience—he’s been called to
      stories.
   c. “Those are very important things. And they only come out by telling.”
      Incredible interaction here—narrative theory happening, meta-happening.
      i. 35:45 of interview 2: Sal’s explicit about what telling has done for
         him. I mention the “washes you soul” quote.
   d. My belief in stories—personal and collective transformation.
   e. My philosophy “we need to talk about these things to understand them”—
      individually and at a global level, we’re still “coming to terms” with the
       Holocaust.
      i. 39:20 of interview 2: I talk about what I like about oral history:
         The wisdom of experience, the phrases Sal and Sandy use. The
         ability to distil experience.
   f. Great explicit interaction of me and Sal talking about the power of
      narrative/narrative theory in praxis. (process notes)
   g. Factual information pops up—so do insights (he tells me his favorite—
      intriguingly complex in it’s not-truth—example: Wladyslaw Tourec): (Good description of this is my qualitative methods paper for Carolyn’s class.)
   h. The evidence that Sal’s story is fleshed out between Shoah and FHM
      interviews.
      i. Telling is the first theme: I’m explicit about “coming to terms” here.
      j. “Is this still uncomfortable—should you let it go?” Sal: quite the
         contrary—it’s his duty to tell. (Called to stories.)
   k. 1:19:00 of dinner interview w Carolyn, I talk about overlaps between
      narrative theory/inquiry, Jewish storytelling, Sal’s storytelling, and
      communication.
   l. We reflect on Sal’s process from not telling to telling—his girlfriend who
      discovered his secret—last date—how he’s softened: “Yeah. Well I’m not
      afraid to tell. That’s the crux of it. (p. 28 process)
   m. **How Sal and Sandy’s marriage/relationship has changed in relation to
      his telling**—great interaction/quotes (p. 2 Sandy).
      i. This leads Sandy into telling the 1973 story—the Godfather story
         (p. 6 Sandy) (Key Sal and Sandy interactions here (p. 2-6)
         1. Sal helps me/Sandy get back to the question (how their
      lives have changed related to Sal’s telling) Sandy: “This
        was a big revelation.”

3. A central problem: **People don’t listen,** they don’t have time, it’s not fun, they
   remain ignorant (good etymology for me, tied to mindfulness, ignorant doesn’t
mean “dumb,” just “banal evil” (in Arendt’s words) of ignoring what is). This, for me and Sal, is a main source of violence in the world and a main source of people’s detachment from their own and others’ humanity. It’s hard to listen—takes dedication and awareness and processing one’s own issues.

a. I make the point people don’t listen in an engaged way
b. “Adults think it’s a story”, they don’t believe him.
c. Before nobody wanted to listen, now he was in a crowd that wanted to listen. (p. 28 of Sal notes)
   i. Second-to-last interview (process notes p. 21), Sal gives a lot of credit to Spielberg for why people listen (mirrors literature).
      1. This leads Sal to retell his story of becoming a storyteller
      2. “If you want to thank somebody—Spielberg.” This brings me to talk about my reading of the literature and critical academics (critical of Spielberg)
d. It’s the adults—they think that stories are “bologna.”
   i. We talk about Jewish-American kids. Nice interactions here.

4:00(2nd interview)
e. We talk about the importance of audience! Sal uses my words (I identify as a performer/PS teacher): Sal: “Right. Sometimes I suck, yes.” (48:20)
f. Sal: “It’s so sad, when you have a story to tell, you have something to be proud of, and you have nobody to share it with.” Sandy: “That’s what he went through.” Sal: “That’s what I went through.” (He says this referring to him passing his CPA exam, but I think it goes deeper.)
g. “They play dumb” (Sal brings up his business people not listening, the Schindler)
h. Toward the end of our final interview (it’s raining as I type), talking about the medical system and Robyn’s compassionate (not efficient) approach, Sal stumbles onto what, for me, at a radical and fundamental, is what our time together is about—not a system, not mass production, slowing down, taking time/care, listening, sharing time together, going around in circles. Sal: “It’s about, in any system. The world is so mass production that nothing counts anymore.” (more to this quote, p. 43 process). I link this to my career choice—highlighting specific things I think should “count.”

4. A defining story in Sal’s life: Kenny finally seeks out Sal’s history—people want to listen.

5. “Let’s see what we can do.” Sal’s involvement with the FHM—very important to all of this. “I’ll try”. Gets involved with kids/schools—Mr. Davis and the teepee story—remembering rainy days—“the circuit” Sandy says--.
   a. He does it to potentially help one or two kids.
   b. Sal’s destiny and when he started fulfilling it.
   c. “Whatever I can do regardless of how silly it is.”
      i. My “selfish” hope that Sal gets something from you time together.
   d. “If I hadn’t gotten involved with the museum after I retired, I probably wouldn’t have evolved to where I am now.”
e. Key QUOTE: “somehow, I have a feeling, if I keep telling, there are going to be other discoveries… “big kettle of soup” quote. (tied to themes 2 and 26)

f. It’s a credo Sal learned from this father: “Let’s see what we can do.” I think this informs Sal’s memory and storytelling quest.

g. Sal’s duty. (p. 23 process notes). His want to make a book—me: “to turn life into a story” (ties to theme 2). KEY ITNERACTION.

6. Why in God’s name? Two questions: Why did he survivor? Is he more or less religious (a deep theme for he and me, develops especially in the later interviews).
   a. The God questions return: He must/must not exists—Sal explains both sides (and his in-between perspective).
   b. The faith question—Sal’s a complicated man.
   c. Sal’s faith transition—from orthodox rabbi to unorthodox, moral compassionate/Jewish cultural identity. Once he retired he got involved with the Tampa synagogue.
   d. How’s God sitting with you these days? We really connect here—great interaction and great quotes—the theme has been developed, finally, here!!! (p. 28 Sal)

7. The complicated history of Sal’s “first” telling. Rebecca’s school. 15 mins. Superficial. Tied to theme #2: narrative theory.

8. To tell or not to tell? The sister question.
   a. Sal tells the eating the dead rat story that upsets his sister. (p. 32 of Sal notes) Great interaction here—a must-include
   b. By our final recorded interview, I talk about how I understand that his sister’s struggle really is tied back the murders she witnessed—Sal and Sandy agree (p. 32 process): Sal: “It’s still there, you know.” Sandy: “That is definitely a big factor, a big explanation of everything.”
   c. Sandy’s wise take on the question of “to tell or not to tell”—also tied to the importance of each individual’s story—nice quote to capture my interest in “erring on the side of particularity.”

9. Sal’s take on “enhancing” the story and hearing other survivors—“crude and rude and whatever it is—that’s it” (I take this as an ethical guideline from Sal himself) (Great quote for Steve)
   a. Hollywood and popular cultural representation of the Holocaust (nice interactions here about Spielberg)
   b. “Dirty it by cleaning it up” Sal: “By making fun of it! By making fun.”
   c. Delbo and the limits of representation, interpretation, and aesthetics
      i. Sal and I agree, in his words: “There’s something to be realized that a lot of times, even when something isn’t good, it creates something. It creates something good” (another guide for the ethics/aesthetics of this work—just do it, even if it sucks.)
d. The future deserves to know in all the details. This sparks something Sal never told to anyone: the smell of the women’s periods in the cellar.
e. At Thai dinner, 1:22:30, Sal repeats how he hears survivors embellish and how he disagrees with this tactic.
f. P. 23 process, we go back and forth about human limits and even if it’s wrong. We’re all wrong. “So we do the best we can.”
g. 19:45 last interview, Sal doesn’t mind parts being cut out but will not allow someone to say something that isn’t true. (p. 33 process)
h. The “Phil Gans” (Holocaust camp survivor who dresses up in the blue stripped uniform when he tells his story) effect/affect and how it differs from Sal’s sensibilities. (p. 34 process): Sandy: “Sal can’t act the story. He can tell it but he can’t do it for the sake of this or that. You know, he just tells it.” Me: “It’s not a schtick.” Sal: “Yeah.” Sandy: “Exactly.”
i. Also 1gi: Sandy: “Chronological, dry, no feeling whatsoever. No insights, no feelings.” (p. 7 Sandy)

10. Me learning about Jewish culture: (p. 1-2 Sandy notes): Sal’s initial take on being Jewish.
   a. Yarzheit—the day of my father’s death
   b. Bobomeise
   c. Shabbas goy
   d. Yeshiva
   e. The difference between orthodox, conservative, and reform rabbis.
   f. The Hassid movement—they believe the messiah is coming presently.
   g. The Habbat movement—the only Jew-to-Jew proselytizers.
   h. The book *Hidden Children* inspired Sal to write his story.
   i. Sal talks about the Yiddish writer Shalom Aleichem (p. 19 process notes).
   j. 1:27:00 (Thai dinner interview), Sal talk about the Cholent.
   k. “The greep” (what Sal’s father called the cellar, the Yiddish word seems to be “grub,” meaning pit, grave, or dungeon)—he wants that to be the name of his book.

11. Sal and Sandy affirm and confirm that “it’s working” (our time together is meaningful to them)
   a. Brought new things out that have not been brought out before.
   b. New audience, new people will find out.
   c. The story he hadn’t even told Sandy! (30:30 of interview 2: Father stabbed in back.
      i. 30:30 of interview 2 this story comes out: “Now we’re talking about it right now. I remember a lot of things.”
   d. “I don’t get into it [talks of faith] with anybody.” (except me, I guess)
   e. I get the “softer side” of Sal—even softer when it’s just him and me and Sandy’s not there.
f. “I never tell this to anybody…. There were… ten women going through their periods…. Can you imagine the smell?”

g. The quote from Sal: “It’s meaningful for two reasons” (process notes)

h. “Challenges” to Sal’s memory: First insight: 1985 or 1995? (they are intrigued by these)
   i. Helps them see I’m a good listener.
   ii. KEY MOMENT WLADISLAW happens: 37:17 of interview 2. (p. 10 process notes): Sandy: “That’s very psychological.”

i. Dream or reality? I need to check Shoah interview—20:00 into second interview.

j. Sal: “You know it’s funny, how when they ask certain questions certain things come out.”

k. Sal: “I’m going to tell you something else I probably shouldn’t.” Me: “Those are my favorite things you tell me.” (Sal talks about Jewish kids being less interested in his story than non-Jewish kids)

l. Sandy: talking about collaborative method: “It’s so much better to do it that way, ‘case you can get, you really become very close to the person.”

m. Key interaction, at dinner before Carolyn arrives: (p. 16/17 process notes). Relates to theme 1 being REALIZED: They talk about how our method is working. They talk about “spirit.” They talk about the importance of the “hearer.”

n. 1:35:08 (second-to-last) Sal: “You know what, you’re a good interviewer. You elicit answers. They said it about Barbara Walters. Maybe you’re in the wrong profession?” (p. 27 process)

o. Sal wanted only me to read his book. (p. 35 process) Me: “That tells me a lot.”

p. Explicit example of me getting the “softer side” of Sal no one saw (36 process): 39:16 (last interview): Sandy: “Yeah, you have definitely seen a side of Sal that nobody else has seen. I mean, I’ve seen.” KEY INTERACTION HERE

12. Sal’s regrets and fears: 1) that he didn’t start fulfilling his destiny until earlier. All that has been lost with his parents’ deaths.
   a. My optimistic perspective: We have now, we have today.
   b. His kids and grandkids—will they listen?
   c. “Am I going to die before I can…. Am I going to lose my mind?” Things that bother Sal.
   d. What makes Sal sad a lot of times is all that he lacks—the material void! Even the photo he had before the war is now lost.
   e. 1:17:00 of third interview—it bothers Sal that he thinks he’s instilled hatred in his kids about the Poles—links to theme 13.
   f. 2:00:20 (2nd): Sal is sad that he doesn’t have more physical artifacts, like other survivors, not even any photos—only one, now seemingly lost—. Sandy: “There was nothing. We had nothing.” Me: “That’s what makes it so important to keep these stories alive” (p. 14 of process notes—lots of great exchanges here). (ALSO TIED TO 26 [why] and 25 [identification])
i. I suggest that Sal might be a packrat because he wants to save his memories. Sandy agrees. (theme 25 here too)
g. “I have three granddaughters. When will they ever? That’s a good question. And that sort of bothers me” (Sal foreshadows his death here). (p. 20 process notes)
h. Sal’s big fear as he neared the end of life, and Sandy’s too: How will she learn the finances? I help him ease this fear a bit. (56:56 of final interview)

13. Sal’s anger at Poles more than Germans
   a. Sal’s story of how he evolved in thinking about the Sokals.
      i. Wanted to have Sokol’s honored by Yad Vashem

14. Sal’s book—the history of where it came from, how it started
   a. They don’t like my labels: “creative nonfiction”
   b. We begin our third interview talking about the book. Sal’s dad died in 1992 his mom in 2000. Sal feels the book is becoming more hers that his: “This book is about me, not about Debbie.”
   c. Last interview—we start with my reaction to the book—Sal only let me read it—me and Sandy only—no Dr. Ellis, not his brother (talk lots about this p. 29-30 process).

15. The little things I notice that others might not: Sal’s pen. Even in the photo Sandy wants to include with my chapter for Steve.

16. Context for the “kind of guy” Sal was
   a. Tuesdays and Fridays he did medical interpreting/ translating
   b. Felt like he lost his childhood. He made ice skates out of a wedge of a log.
      i. I link this to the Russian, Vlodimanko. Sal says it was Europe—they had to be crafty.
   c. P. 24 of Sal notes: The phone call from the telemarketer—Sal tells him off.
   d. Sal was almost an orthodox rabbi—skull cap story.
   e. 13:50 of second interview, the “funny story” of Sal’s accent. Sandy calls it “the ongoing story of Sal’s accent”—great interactions here.
      i. Sandy was introduced to Sal as being Costa Rican (Same time: 13:50).
   f. Sal the business man, consultant, prolific CPA, practice weapons manufacturer. 1:45:15: fun end of the interview, you can hear Sal showing me the bullets in the living room (p. 29 of notes).
   g. Sal is a staunch believer in only worrying about things he can control. P. 40—great examples here.
   h. 33:30 of second interview, great quote (p. 8 Sandy) from Sandy about insight and Sal’s personality being tied to his father’s. Sal is stubborn in an ethical way.
17. The murders: Parts to transcribe: during interview two we begin by reviewing his previous interview and I talk to him about the parts that struck me, by 20 mins in, we get to the story of his sister’s death, his surviving sister’s “not come to terms” (as Sandy says) with this. Need to use this scene from out interview. He says he rarely tells about this. Sandy is really engaged here too.
   a. Sal takes us through the day of the murders (0:2:10 of second tape of interview 2) (super detailed telling here—important to use this scene)
   b. This leads to the escape into the Rye and Wheat fields prior to liberation.

18. Sal’s father: the ordinary hero. (11c as well): Miracles in ordinary stories
   a. When Sal had to take care of his elderly father the roles switched.
   b. A bunch of miracles and Sal’s dad says, “There’s nothing as strong as the human mind, the human being.”
   c. How did his dad know about the Rye and Wheat? (p. 24 of Sal notes)
   d. He was never a show-off guy.
   e. Sal and Sandy tie his personality to his father. I add some nice stuff here.
   f. A nice extended, tangential story that says a lot about Sal and his dad—Sal admits to smoking cigarettes at 16.
   g. When Sal was 21, 22, he started the transition of knowing more than his dad. Sal’s dad would ask Sal for his advice.
   h. I add a nice little thing to Sal’s understanding of his dad.
   i. The only thing his father carried with him was the family Torah. Was housed in the Hebrew Academy when they moved to Miami. Now in Israel.


20. Sal’s phases of memory. Liberation; with his bro in Paris; Young-adult; professional phase; Museum involvement (great quote here 1:11:30 of second interview).
   a. I ask Sal if his memory ever came out in dreams, he blushes, say Sandy should leave, she doesn’t, he tells the story of an old girlfriend and his nightmare.
   b. I ask Sal if his memories still bother him (p. 24 of Sal notes). He says no and relates this to his father being resourceful.
   c. Deep memory: “I could smell it now.”
   d. 44:47 of interview 2: my meta-commentary on watching Sal remember. “The reason I do that is because I try to eliminate every other image that I see.”
   e. 1:32:50 (2nd): As we listen to others’ memories, we form our own images and memories trying to make sense of theirs.
      i. 1:32:50 (2nd interview): Sandy explains that she tried to draw her conception of the cellar from what Sal’s told her—explains how hard it is. You have it in mind but can’t really put it together (I can identify, now).
   f. P. 24 process, Sal explains his first phase with his brother—fantasies.
21. Sal mentions trauma and traumatic memory
   a. 45:36 he answers the question he’s asked ever time he’s interviewed—
      how did you remember, you were so young? “something traumatic stays
      with you forever.”

22. Sal’s relationship with the Russian man.
   a. Description of him.  
   b. Communication, how the Russian got to Sal—songs, Russian language.

23. Liberation story—more miracles, language
   a. Homecoming, more miracles from shabbas goy saved the family Torah
   b. The prayer book his uncle made in the cellar is now in Yad Vashem.
   c. The details of his miraculous liberation (35:00 tape 2 interview 2). (p. 15
      process notes)

24. Sal the proud grandfather.
   a. His granddaughter and the Hillel school.
      i. This story is at p. 23 process notes

25. IDENTIFICATION/COMPASSION/Connection between Sal and me
   a. I share my dad’s approach to not getting us to smoke—smoke ‘em all!
   b. About 20 mins into first interview, we connect. He sees that I’m listening
      and listening hard. He hears that I’m trying to ask him things in ways he’s
      never been asked before.
   c. We start to find our flow.
   d. When I share my motive and personal story, they connect with me deeply
      and trust me more. A key moment in first interview (quote in process
      notes). Sandy sees the parallels.
   e. Parallels between cancer and the Holocaust. Lots of interaction here!
   f. I get chills (beyond discursive thinking—embodied)
   g. It comes out that I’m not Jewish at 43:40 of first interview.
   h. We connect as “teachers”
   i. My first publication and my grandmother’s reaction. The ethics/politics of
      family stories.
   j. I relate to them as grandparents. They dig it.
   k. We identify as non-Southerners—non-sweet-tea drinkers.
      i. Sandy whispers: “I can’t stand it. It’s not for me.” (p. 7 Sandy)
   l. I talk about Sal’s hair—not “romancing” or “romanticizing” but humans
      connecting and relating.
   m. I reflect, explicitly, about this theme. Sal/Sandy confirm: “Yep.” (51:35
      2nd)
   n. 59:00: Good example of using my experience with other survivors
      (Nathan Snyder) to connect with Sal—story of the “scapegoat.”
   o. 1:13:20 I identify with Sal’s “good” memory and intellectual gifts. Bring
      up CPA exam.
We’re becoming friends.

I identify about the GRE. Sal tells another story, arriving late to a test. (9th percentile, no preparation)

We identify as “true” b.s.-ers.

At our dinner with Carolyn, they’re interested in my educational history/trajectory.

Cancer: I tell him about my best friend’s dad (p. 26 process).

7:45 of last interview, our debate about if we’d be here if not for the tragedies in our lives—lots of tensions and wonderful interactions here (p. 30/31 process): “impossible question.” Sal and Sandy go back and forth here.

Last interview, Sal is a friend/grandparent/guide: Sal wants to know if I like his cooking—I do—then asks: “How’s your thesis going?” (p. 33 process)—I talk about my maturation process (34).

We identify about Spanish. Sal finds out about my Puerto Rican heritage. Asks why I don’t speak. Identifies with my mom not teaching us like he didn’t teach his kids.

My dad’s joke: “Cancer’s the most effective diet—but I wouldn’t recommend it.” (p. 38 process)

At the end of our last recorded interview, I ask Sal if he has any financial advice for a young guy starting out. Sal: “I don’t know what else I can do for you.” Me: “Well you’ve done plenty. You fed me lunch and you talked to me. You let me smell that delicious borscht. So…” (p. 44 process).

26. WHY REMEMBER? WHY TELL THIS STORY? Powerful interaction here. Central. Tied also to theme 11 (that it’s working—that our work is valuable).

This may be the thesis and conclusion of my dissertation—what Sal and I say here.

I ask again, “What do we learn?”

Sal says that the Nazis demoralized the Jews—maybe we’re attempting to “re-moralize”?

Sal’s Wisdom—56:50: “Also as part of telling it, I guess I realized that people are people…. You can’t blame a whole population…” Sal learned, through telling/thinking, that he can’t hate the Poles.

1:00:40: Sandy sees that Sal’s learned not to generalize.

Not the will to meaning (as Frankl says) the will, ambition, and fortuitiveness to live for life itself. **Great interaction here.** (p. 31-32 of Sal notes): Reminds me of the Bruce Springsteen song Life Itself ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhrpnoeQBrI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhrpnoeQBrI)); that’s the experience of life and compassion and the “beyond” from which our stories emerge.

1:25:30 (2nd): “To tell it 100% the way it was is an impossible thing. But to be able to understand the intricacies of your experience of telling it…” Sandy: “That’s fascinating.”

At dinner, before Carolyn arrives, I get to the main thesis: How does a human find/create meaning in chaos? Instead of looking to theorists, I want to ask us. A classical question. Most myth/storytelling has to do with
meaning. Sal wisely responds (something that took Campbell a long time to learn too): “A reason to continue living.” The experience of life.

f. My motive: second to last interview—it’s all here, p. 20 process notes.

Sandy thinks a good title for Sal’s book is “I don’t have a number. I have a story.” I think this speaks to the important of Sal’s story (and “stories” generally, tied to theme 2).

27. Sal makes me food while we talk—I’m always excited
   a. Grilled cheese in the toaster oven. (1:10:00 second-to-last, p. 25 process).
   b. “I make grilled cheese. And I make hot chocolate.”
   c. Our last recorded interview, Sal makes me the “Sal special” (as Sandy might say): (p. 32 process): wonderful interactions here.
   d. The funny watermelon interaction (p. 37 process).
   e. Sal is making kraut borscht—shows me. He doesn’t have a recipe—just puts stuff in.

28. Things that wouldn’t happen in traditional oral history interview: Phone call interruptions—the one where Sal passes me the phone. (These happen many times in each interview—definitely different than traditional interviews here.)
   a. I talk about my interest in dream research and a friend’s website.
   b. Our interview is about childhood memory over a lifetime (not with people who were older when the Holocaust happened).
   c. Dinner at the Thai restaurant. Carolyn arrives—lots of friendly banter.
   d. Sal making dinner while we talk. (p. 36/37 process)

29. Sal’s illness becomes a theme:
   a. 46:42 of final recorded interview: “I’ve taken a break.”
   b. Second-to-last interview I ask how he feels confronting cancer and being a survivor at the end of an era—the grandfather clock sounds as I ask the question.
   c. 1:19:00 (second-to-last) Sal’s in a great mood. He talks about his chemo and tests.
   d. 1:21:00 (same as above) talks about not doing clinical trials.
   e. 1:24:40 I point out Sal’s wise perspective on cancer, ask if anything scares him.
      i. (p. 25 process) What scares him is Sandy/Robyn.
      ii. What scares him is “the rest of my life.”
   f. “It took another doctor to tell him, ‘hey, you didn’t do good by your patient.’” (p. 26 process).
   g. Sal ties his wisdom about death to his Holocaust experience—tells me a story he’s never told before about a near-death experience (p. 26/27 process).
   h. Deep reflections on the present moment of Sal’s cancer and how he doesn’t like what he calls the “death march” of visitors and concerned callers (p. 29 process).
i. **Important interaction** 48:00 (approx.) of final interview (p. 37 process): The watermelon interaction. I connect with him with my previous research. **Great scene here: complex, funny/heartfelt. Shows Sal’s character.** p. 38 process notes—I ask how Sandy’s taking it—she walks back in from garage and seems to know what we’re talking about. As soon as she leaves, instantly, Sal jumps back into his story. Good detail here.

j. More details about the severity of his cancer—he doesn’t worry. (p. 40 process)

30. Sandy’s intro to the Holocaust: Judgment at Nuremberg film (process notes).

31. Process reflections: Meta-reflection about the interview as it’s happening—comment about Sandy’s use of language.

32. The “Stories”
   a. The first time Sal saw an airplane (and the difference between his Shoah and FHM descriptions). There is a scene in the FHM interview, details filled in (p. 13 of process notes)
   b. The attic. 16 days. 39 people (mom told them). His aunt’s fiancé’s workshop. The beginning of October. Next day in a hay loft. Then left for Sokal’s.
   c. Sokal’s cellar: “The greep” (in Sal’s words):
      i. “nothing soup” (1:42:02 2\sup{nd}):

33. Sal’s take on historians and the Spielberg debate: Sal: That is important to the historians. To me that’s not important at all. To me what’s important is he brought the awareness, where people actually started asking. And then, when they ask, people feel better about telling. And so to me it’s… and should probably use that in dissertation, you’re welcome.” (p. 21, process) Nice interaction here.
   a. Sal doesn’t like all the quotations I use. ☺
   b. Sal thinks the past 10 years of Holocaust history have been the most important—we’re finally getting somewhere, finally learning to listen.

34. Sal’s kids: He speaks about Robyn and Andy. Talks lots about his grandkids.
   a. Sal talks about Andy (pretty extended conversation (p. 41/42 process).
   b. Talks about Robyn and his granddaughters (p. 42 process).
Appendix B: IRB Approval

February 5, 2013

Chris Patti
Communication
18157 Canal Pointe St
Tampa, FL 33647

RE: Expedited Approval for Continuing Review
IRB#: Pro00000301
Title: Listening With Holocaust Survivors: Innovations in Oral History, Collaboration, and Interpretation


Dear Mr. Patti,

On 2/4/2013 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above protocol for the period indicated above. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number:

(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Protocol Document(s):
Holocaust Study Research Protocol.doc

Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.
We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A Schinka, Ph.D.
John Schinka, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board