

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: F60-00056
Interviewee: Elie Wiesel (EW) Interviewer: Kevin
McGurgan (KM)
Interview date: February 2, 2014
Interview location: Eckerd College
Transcribed by: Brendan Driscoll
Transcription date: March 21, 2014
Audit Edit by: Peter Cannon
Audit Edit date: March 31, 2014
Final Edit by: Kimberly Nordon, MLIS
Final Edit date: April 1, 2014

Kevin McGurgan: Twenty-four years.

Elie Wiesel: Where?

KM: So before here, I've served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Bosnia—

EW: All of them, very quiet places.

KM: All of the very quiet places.

EW: The best. (laughs)

KM: So—so, Bosnia and—

EW: When were you in Bosnia?

KM: Just after the Dayton Peace Accords¹ were signed. So, we had a small embassy, essentially two diplomats. And well, you know, you have two diplomats and, and inside, 30,000 British troops. And we were responsible for trying to work the politics of—

¹The Dayton Peace Accords marked the end of the Bosnian War.

alongside a big American operation, with a—the Dayton Peace Accords. And—and I lived in Bosnia for a year.

And in fact, I'd ended another job later on in the Foreign Office where I was the head of the Serbia and Montenegro and War Criminal Section, where we applied political pressure to—to governments in Belgrade, to hand over Slobodan Milosevic² and—and other—others for trial at The Hague.

EW: I was there. I was in Bosnia.

KM: You were in Bosnia?

EW: I met Milosevic, I met all of his people.

KM: What did you think of him?

EW: He pretended to be a saint.

KM: No. Wow.

EW: The man with blood on his hands, you know.

KM: He did, he did.

EW: But they all do.

KM: Yeah. What do you do—sometimes I wonder what people think about when governments have to deal with people like that?

EW: Justice first of all, justice, no matter what, no matter what.

²Slobodan Milosevic was a Serbian and Yugoslav politician who was president of Serbia and later the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1989 to 2000. Milosevic was indicted in 1999 for war crimes that occurred during the Yugoslav Wars.

KM: Yeah.

EW: I'm not so much for punishment, but for justice.

KM: Yes.

EW: At least justice must be done.

KM: Yeah.

EW: Then who the hell cares, to jail, not to jail? If they can sleep well at night, it's their problem there, but at least justice must be done.

KM: Yeah.

EW: Because it becomes history.

KM: It does. And have you also gone to—

EW: I was there for (inaudible).

KM: To Africa, as far as Rwanda and places?

EW: Not so far. No I didn't go to Rwanda, but I've seen both of the Rwanda things.

KM: Yeah.

EW: I knew enough because at that climate, it's so—so easy to get information—I met the prime minister, the president and so forth, the channels—

KM: Yeah. Yeah. I have not been—been there—I met my wife in Bosnia—I mean she’s not Bosnian but we—we’ve—we met there when we were working there. We—we still go back and uh—

EW: I was there.

KM: To—to Srebrenica, some places. Okay. Want me to ask the questions?

Jane Duncan: I’ve been recording.

KM: Okay.

JD: If that’s okay.

EW: Oh you have been? Go ahead.

KM: Okay—so, okay.

EW: This going to be in my program, not yours.

KM: (laughs) Exactly. Okay. So, can you tell us your story of why you believe it’s right that Britain commemorates the Holocaust for future generations?

EW: What is the alternative? Not to remember? It will give victory—or a sense of victory. It’d be justified, I’m sure. I’m sure an attempt could be made to say, “Look it belongs to the past, nothing to do with us today or for tomorrow, forget it.” Nothing is worse than forgetting. I understand remembering can think it’s wrong, but not to remember is not an option.

[[Items: Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945), Holocaust survivors.]]

KM: Okay. What’s your message to schoolchildren in Britain who are thinking about how Britain should commemorate the Holocaust?

EW: First of all, to know the story—and it's—today, so easy to know the story, to learn about it, so many books have been published by all sides; by the victims, by the perpetrators, by the bystanders, by the governments, by civilians, nearly never before has any event caught such a coverage from all viewpoints, from all aspects, from all sides. So it's easy and not to do so would be to deprive them of—of extraordinary element in education.

[[Items: Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945), Holocaust -- Study and teaching.]]

KM: Yeah. Great. Thank you very—very much. Is that good?

Barbara Lewis: I was gonna' say. Would you mind if I asked a question?

KM: Sure.

BL: It's been almost seventy years since the world finally opened it—it's eyes, to see what had happened in Germany and Eastern Europe. What have we learned in that time?

EW: At—at the time we didn't, of course, to learn afterwards, what we learned first of all is that the role of the witness is of absolute importance. For who is a witness, someone who says, "I was there." Or, "I saw it." Or "I spoke to a witness." To become the witness to a witness is as important as to be a witness. And that is—that is, of course, a precondition, not only for memory but for education. How can one live today, for instance, without realizing that in those times, those times, the whole world was involved for good or bad. On one side, of course there were the good. On the other side there were the bad and their assistants and their collaborators. What made them to do what they did? What made an executioner be capable of—of eating a morning breakfast and lunch and then afternoon, go and kill Jewish children? And come home, speak and—and play with his children? What made him human? Because he was a human being after all? What's it say about the humanity of the human being? Is it a—a—too much to say that in those times, it was human to be inhuman? To shoot a part of humanity? And that is the tragedy. Too easy to say, "God made us do it." God has other things to do.

[[Items: Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945), Holocaust survivors.]]

KM: Okay, thank you very much indeed for giving us your time.

EW: Of course.

KM: Thank you.

End of Interview