

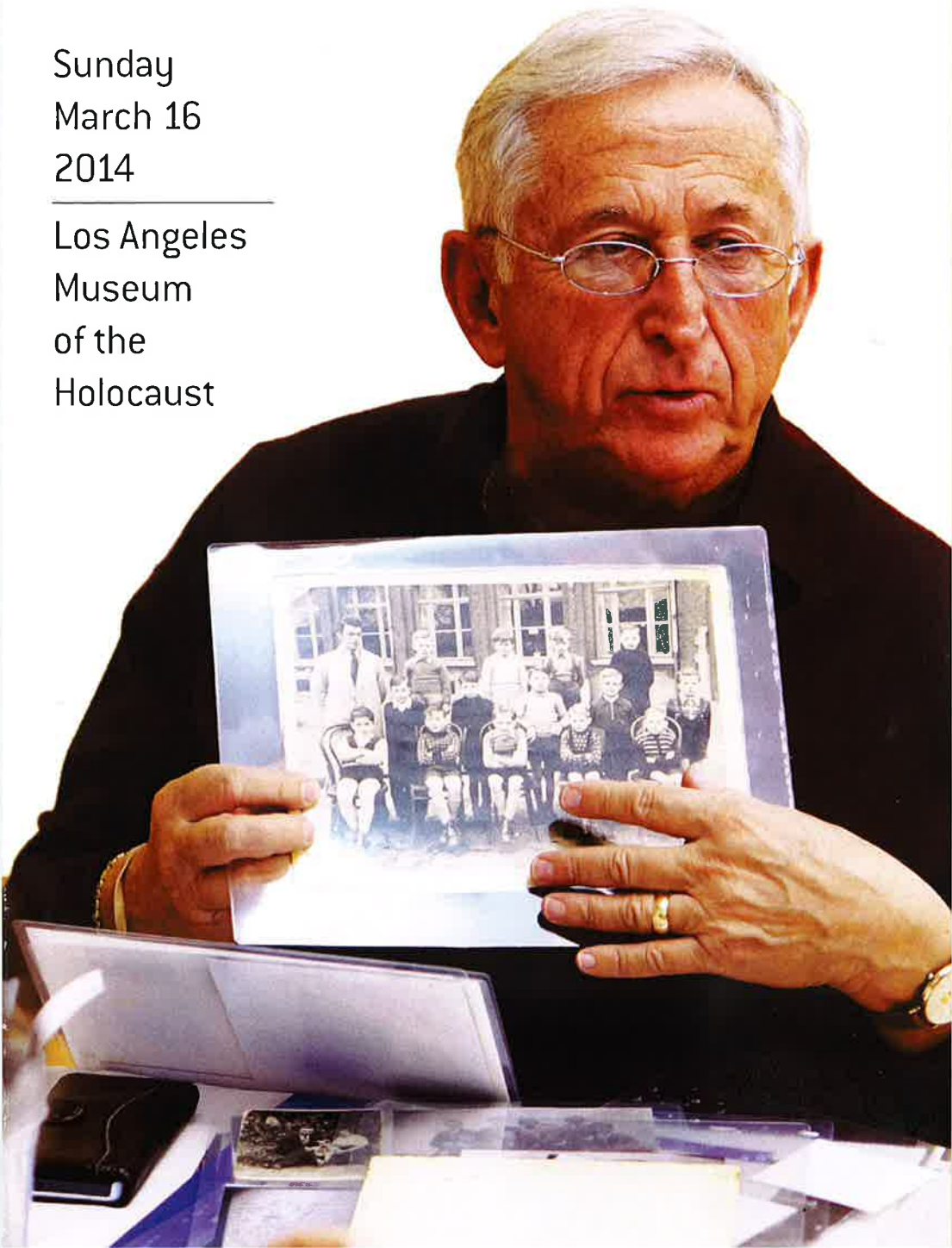
BETWEEN

MEMORY AND HISTORY

INTERVIEWING HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Sunday
March 16
2014

Los Angeles
Museum
of the
Holocaust





**A VERY SPECIAL
THANK YOU
TO THE SURVIVORS**

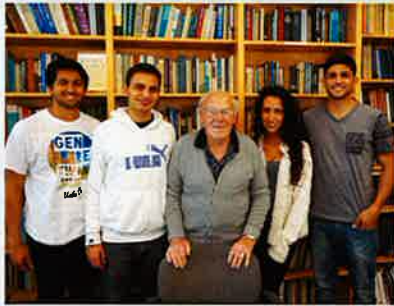


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The distinction between memory and history was put forward by French historian Pierre Nora, who pinpointed a special niche in-between history and memory. In brief, memories are the accumulated remembrances of events actually experienced, while histories represent what historians believe is crucial to remember. Nora argues that memory becomes a subject of study especially when great changes or traumatic ruptures take place in society. He also pioneered connecting memory to physical, tangible locations and objects.

In Professor Todd Presner's course, German 118SL, *Between Memory and History: Interviewing Holocaust Survivors in the Digital Age*, students have a unique opportunity to grapple with these issues and tensions while recognizing the value of eyewitness testimony of the Holocaust.

This class is offered as part of UCLA's "service learning" initiative led by the UCLA Center for Community Learning. The service component has allowed undergraduate students to work with and learn from survivors; in addition, they have contributed to the creation of public knowledge of the Holocaust at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust. For the third year, as the final class project, students worked in groups to curate publicly available audio tours that integrate the eyewitness testimony of individual survivors with the museum's archival collections.

Todd Presner is the Sady and Ludwig Kahn Director of the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies and Chair of the Digital Humanities Program, as well as Professor of Germanic Languages and Comparative Literature.



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THANK YOU TO ALL WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE

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CELEBRATING
160 YEARS
OF SERVICE



Intro:

My name is Bob Geminder, and I, along with my mother Bertl, stepfather Emil, and older brother George survived the Holocaust. It is my belief that luck played a tremendous role in our survival during those incredibly difficult years.

The story of my family's survival, as well as my father's death, will be told by UCLA students throughout the following rooms of the museum.

Room 1: The World that Was (The Red Tricycle)

Robert Geminder was born on August 3rd, 1935 in Wroclaw, Poland, one of the largest cities in Poland, to Mano and Bertl Geminder and an older brother, George, who was born two years earlier on May 31st, 1933. They got along very well. His family owned a number of apartment buildings and they grew up as a well to do Jewish family.

He recalls having a very happy childhood, and distinctly remembers his parents bringing home a beautiful red tricycle for him. They also had a gorgeous white car, which was incredibly rare for anyone to have in 1939. As a child, he remembers thinking that it seemed like all was well in the world, and that his family would live in harmony in Poland.

Room 2: The Rise of Nazism

Due in large part to the fact that he lived in Poland, Robert did not experience Nazism as it began spreading throughout Germany

during the early 1930s. However, both he and his brother recall experiences with prejudice in Poland, with many of the Polish being quite anti-Semitic. For example, Polish citizens would often inform the Nazi authorities about various hiding places and activities of Jews.

Room 3: Onset Of War/Ghetto

In September of 1939, Germany invaded his home country and the Nazi soldiers forced Bob's family to swiftly pack their belongings and board a train for eastern Poland, which was controlled by the Soviets at this point in time. Due to the Nazi-Soviet treaty signed a few weeks prior, which promised non-aggression amongst the two countries, they were not allowed to leave the country for protection. Sometime in 1940, Bob's family found refuge in an apartment in Stanislawow, Ukraine (now Ivano-Frankivsk), and used the money and jewelry they brought from home to support themselves. However, in 1941, the bombing of Stanislawow began. During this point in time, they attempted to protect themselves by placing mattresses against the windows. While boarded up in the apartment, his father experienced a heart attack, as a result of the stress from the bombing. Since they could not leave the apartment, his father could not get any help and passed away.

Unfortunately, after these terrible events, things only worsened for his family. On the morning of October 12, 1941, ,known

as "Bloody Sunday", they were ordered and trucked, by the Nazis, to come to the center of the city. They were brought to the town cemetery where mass graves had already been dug. The Nazi soldiers did not want to wait for the establishment of extermination camps to start killing the Jewish people. The Nazis demanded people to show their papers and give them valuables. After gathering belongings, the Nazi soldiers proceeded to kill 8,000-12,000 of the 20,000 Jews that were gathered there. Once night arrived, they were released into the cold and chaos arose. Bob and his brother were knocked down during the stampede and left on the ground. His grandmother found them and somehow the three of them made it back to the apartment to be reunited with his mother, who was astonished that they had all returned.

After the tragic events of October 12th, Bob's family settled in a vacant apartment that had been looted. However, this was just the beginning of their journey because in December of 1941, they were forced from the apartment into a ghetto. In the ghetto, the four of them- his brother, mother, grandmother and Bob -- shared a single room apartment with two additional families. It was in this ghetto that his Mother, Bertl, became close with Emil Brotfeld, an incredibly courageous fellow who she later married.

In early 1942, Bob's future stepfather was informed that the ghetto was going to be liquidated. His mother was conflicted because she refused to leave her mother and family, so she consulted a rabbi, who told her that it should be her priority to ensure that her children

survive. With this advice, they escaped the ghetto, but unfortunately left the rest of their family behind.

They traveled to Warsaw, where they stayed with his stepfather's family, and then obtained false identity papers, and moved into rural areas in search of something to eat and to escape the Nazis. Later, his mother found a family near Krakow, who agreed to hide Bob and his brother. Bob remembers being told that this was in exchange for one of the apartment complexes they owned.

They intended to blend in with the community so that suspicion would not arise about their Jewish roots. At this time, families who housed refugees would be murdered, so it was imperative to conceal their identities. However, one day, when they were attending church, his brother placed a hat on his head, which is a Jewish custom. When the people saw the hat on his brother's head, they started to grow suspicious about Bob's family. After this experience, they continued moving around.

Bob's family returned to Warsaw in 1944 when word spread that the Russians were approaching. When they were in Warsaw, the uprising began and when the Germans defeated the Warsaw uprising, his family, with everyone else, was rounded up and sent to the train station, where they were set to board a train to Auschwitz.

Room 4: Deportation & Extermination

When Bob's family was sent on trains to Auschwitz, his mother saw an open railcar, so he along with his brother, mother, and stepfather boarded it. Right before they arrived at Auschwitz, the railcar was stopped, just a few hundred feet before they were supposed to disembark at the camp. Bob's stepfather pushed him over the side of the open railcar, and he was able to unlock the door, allowing his entire family to escape. A few other families attempted to escape after them, but the Nazis on the train had noticed and started shooting. They hid in a haystack until the Nazis left and spent that night hiding in the cellar of a farmhouse. A day later, they moved into an apartment, where they stayed until Poland was liberated by the Soviet Red Army in early 1945.

Room 5: Labor, Concentration, and Death Camps

While Bob, along with his immediate family, managed to survive and avoid the concentration camps, unfortunately, much of his extended family was not as lucky as they were, and suffered tremendously at the hands of the Nazis. Bob's cousins were murdered in Auschwitz, and even more of my relatives went missing, never to be heard from again. His grandmother was left behind in the Stanislawow ghetto, and presumably was killed there, as they were unable to take her along during our escape.

Due in large part to his stepfather's incredible bravery, Bob's

immediate family and he were lucky in avoiding the concentration and death camps. They had heard stories of the atrocities occurring in these camps, and thus upon hearing that they were going to be sent to Auschwitz, it became clear that they needed to take immediate action to ensure that they would not end up suffering the same fate that their neighbors and family had.

Room 6: World Response, Resistance, and Rescue

As he sat in hiding, the world was not responding to the news of the Holocaust; countries around the world were standing by without offering any help for the resistance. Countries refused to admit refugees seeking asylum, and waited as long as possible to involve themselves in World War II. Only a few countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, attempted to help those who were attempting to flee.

Additionally, there were a number of individuals who attempted to rebel and resist the Nazis. Among the most well-known resistance movements was the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which culminated with the death and capture of almost all of the remaining 55,000 inhabitants. Just over a year later, on August 1, 1944, the Warsaw uprising began, where Polish residents sought to overcome the Nazi officers. After the failed resistance that left close to 200,000 civilians dead, the Nazis sent thousands of people, including Bob's family, to concentration camps. His family was able to escape the train and went into hiding until the end of the Holocaust.

Room 7: Life after Liberation

After the Holocaust ended, his family returned to our old apartment complex in Bielsko, in hopes of finding our other family members. He had been reunited with just one of his cousins and never saw the rest of his family who had been in Germany. Even though the Holocaust ended, anti-Semitism was at a peak. One day after seeing a movie with his brother, a group of Polish kids started throwing rocks at them and yelled that they should go back to Palestine. When they arrived at home and his mother had seen our bruises and cuts, she began packing our bags for America. They had family in Pittsburgh, so his mother paid a man who could take us to West Germany, and from there we took a boat to America. He started school in Pittsburgh and eventually graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a degree in engineering. Bob was then drafted into the US army. After some time, he went to Loyola Marymount University and received his teaching credentials. He worked as a calculus teacher and married Judy Strauss. They had three children together. Bob's family did not talk a lot about our experiences in the Holocaust, but he is now an active member in synagogues and school programs, which focus on teaching about the Holocaust.