**ENGL 2020: Holocaust Survivor Literature Online**

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**Final Project: Considering Testimony vs. Literature**

**Overview**:

For your final work of the semester, we will reach beyond the (virtual) literature classroom to explore video testimonies by Holocaust survivors. Unlike **memoirs** that share individual stories in a creative, actively crafted (organized, phrased) fashion, **testimonies** are recorded interviews in which individuals tell their stories (of life before, during, and sometimes after the Holocaust) to an interviewer in front of a camera (or audio recorder), organizing their thoughts as they go, sometimes returning to topics they have skipped or want to reinforce and other times pausing to deal with emotions that arise as they relive trauma and loss or love and hope. We hear accents and various expressive styles, and we see the individual and experience their story as the survivor tells it, without the distance and careful processing through structured and polished writing for publication.

For this project, you will gain access to a database and select one individual’s testimony to study, based on specific criteria and categories that interest you and might provide interesting comparison with what we’ve read. (You can select survivor’s gender or age during the Holocaust, nationality, reasons for being targeted, form of persecution faced, or the like). By narrowing your search, you can also increase the likelihood that there will be interesting similarities between the individual whose testimony you watch and the four books we have read.

After watching the video testimony and reading any accompanying information provided, you will write about it. You will begin by offering a detailed overview of the individual’s story, including discussion of particular themes or perspectives they share (psychological, philosophical, spiritual, political, etc.).

Next, you will bring aspects of the individual you write about into conversation with one or more of the survivors we have read about in class. You will consider what specific life details, experiences, and perspectives are shared by your individual and Nechama Tec, Olga Lengyel, Pierre Seel, or Vladek Spiegelman – or any other person we meet in their books. It may be that the individual you choose is very well prepared and gives good advice to their family, like Nechama Bawnik’s father Roman. Or perhaps the individual witnesses a loved one killed before their eyes in the camps, like Pierre Seel. The key will be to find specific similarities and discuss their importance and presentation in video testimony vs. literature. You may also attend to differences within general similarities, such as comparing and contrasting a man’s experience in Auschwitz with Olga Lengyel’s or another’s encounter with Nazi perpetrator Irma Grese. (Just avoid broad differences that are obvious, such as one in hiding vs. one in a camp or adult vs. child.)

Finally, you will conclude this project with reflection on the meaning and value of this assignment to you.

All the details for each step are listed below. I hope you find this a rewarding experience with which to end the course.

**Instructions for Finding a Video Testimony**

**1. Access the Fortunoff Archives**

* For this project, you will need to access the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. The Archive’s collection contains over 4,000 testimonies of Holocaust survivors, witnesses, and liberators. After a brief sign-up process, students (and faculty) can access this database on campus or remotely.
* Begin by accessing the [MTSU library link to the Fortunoff Archive](https://library.mtsu.edu/fortunoff). Complete instructions are listed on this page, but here they are in brief:
* Click on the *ezproxy* Archive link (which will prompt you to sign into your MTSU account).
* Click the blue Login button on the upper right of the page.
* At the bottom of the pop-up Login screen, click “Join Now.”
* Create a password fulfilling the Archive’s requirements.
* You will receive a confirmation email with a button to click to let you in.

**2. Search and Request Access to Testimonies**

* Once you enter the Fortunoff Video Archive, you may search for a testimony and request access. Given the focus of our class, be sure to include “survivor” as a search term, plus other subject terms that interest you (and relate to what we have read). When you see the group of entries produced by the search, you can read about each individual through the text at the right (click the “more” buttons to read as much as possible before selecting and watching the testimony, most of which are over an hour long – some are longer).
* You only need to request access to one testimony to obtain viewing rights for the entire collection.
* You should receive an approval email a few minutes after you make your request. You will also receive a link to the film you requested. However, if you are **off campus**, the link you receive will not work (because it will not recognize you as an MTSU user). In this case, you will need to enter the Fortunoff main site, log in, and search for the video you requested access to. (This means you need to write down the title of the video, such as “Aaron E. Holocaust Testimony,” so you can find it from an off-campus login.)
* You are now ready to screen your testimony. If you do not wish to work with the first testimony you watch, return to the Archive and select another. You may screen as many as you like before choosing the one you wish to write about.

**Written Elements:**

1. **Summary** (about 500 words): Write a detailed overview of the testimony, including the individual’s background info and experiences (before, during, and – if stated – after the Holocaust). This work must include at least 2 direct quotations from the video interview (or transcription, if provided).
2. **Comparison** (about 500 words): Compare this individual’s background and experiences to that of others whose memoirs we have read this semester. Provide a discussion of similarities you observe, being as specific as possible. Consider such similarities as:
   1. Background: homeland, specific village/city, religion, upbringing, interests, economics, hopes for the future, family relationships
   2. Holocaust experience: hidden, ghetto, camps, dehumanization, violence, loss of family or friends, resistance/escape
   3. Post-Holocaust experience (if provided): liberation, community, hopes for the future, role of memory, commemoration
3. **Reflection** (at least 200 words): Conclude by thinking through the meaning and value of the project experience to you and sharing your thoughts in writing. Some prompts to guide you: What have you observed about the similarities and differences between video testimony and written memoirs? What are the implications of these differences for study of the Holocaust or other areas of relevance or interest? Have you learned anything about yourself in the process of completing this project? How might you use what you have learned beyond this course?