

The Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor  
Oral History Archive

World Wide Web:  
**[Holocaust.umd.umich.edu](http://Holocaust.umd.umich.edu)**

To forget you is to let you die twice.  
To forget you is to hear forever blasting in my head  
The single long note of the Shofar sounding in the houses  
Of the dead.

From *I Must Tell the Story* by Emily Borenstein

The University of Michigan-Dearborn  
December, 2004

## Executive Summary

The Voice/Vision Archive at the University of Michigan-Dearborn was initiated in 1981 to record and compile a collection of audio and video taped oral histories from Holocaust Survivors (primarily comprised of Survivors living in our geographic area of southeastern Michigan). The collection currently includes taped conversations with Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Rumanian, French, Greek, Belgian, Dutch, Soviet, German, Austrian and Danish Jews.

The Archive exists to maintain a collection of oral testimonies of those who survived the Holocaust and to make these widely accessible for educational purposes. Through the Internet, interlibrary loan, and community outreach, we make the oral testimonies and transcriptions available to researchers, students and the public. No comparable collection of oral testimonies is as free and open to the public as the Voice/Vision Archive.

In addition to its accessibility, two other factors make the Voice/Vision Archive stand out as a scholarly resource: its in-depth handling of the oral testimonies, and the complementary research that accompanies each testimony, providing an historical context for each Survivor's testimony. The Voice/Vision Archive has deliberately avoided formulaic approaches to the gathering of oral testimonies, ensuring that they are not constrained by, or forced to conform to, any limits of length or content.

The administrators of the Archive believe the value of these testimonies grows exponentially when they are made widely available to the public, and are most valuable as a resource once they are transcribed. In fulfillment of this commitment to open access of all material, the Voice/Vision Archive website ([holocaust.umd.umich.edu](http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu)) provides worldwide access to the testimonials and related material, while providing visibility and context to the project. The website averages over 2,500 hits each day.

We have accomplished much with modest annual funding. At the same time, we are building up our endowed fund in an effort to secure the future accessibility and preservation of this resource. Earnings from the endowed fund will be used to permanently secure the salary, benefits and professional development of our full-time Curator, which is today being funded on a year-to-year basis by the University of Michigan-Dearborn. In addition, the endowed fund will provide a source of funds for program support, and will allow us to maintain and extend the many community outreach and educational activities of the Archive. Donors have already provided more than \$180,000 to the endowed fund.

Today, we are requesting a grant of \$50,000 from the Rabbi Israel Miller Fund for Shoah Research, Education and Documentation of the Claims Conference as part of a new and vigorous fundraising initiative – an initiative that will provide a strong foundation for the Voice/Vision Archive as it carries out its mission of preserving the stories of Holocaust survivors for the benefit of current and future generations.

## Introduction

The mission of the Voice/Vision Archive at the University of Michigan-Dearborn is to create personal links between listeners and survivors of the Holocaust for the purpose of providing the listener with an empathetic appreciation of the victims' experiences. The Archive's oral testimonies are helpful for historians, academics, educators, students and teachers, as listeners gain greater insight into the historical event of the Holocaust. The project seeks to reduce antisemitism and racism as it encourages tolerance.

More than 200 survivors of the Holocaust have stepped forward to tell their moving and riveting stories to Dr. Sidney Bolkosky, Director of the Archive and a professor of German history at the University. Dr. Bolkosky has collected these stories for 23 years. That collection, the Voice/Vision Archive, stands today as the most accessible, restriction-free oral archive of Holocaust survivor stories in the English-speaking world.

The Voice/Vision Archive is housed at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, a satellite campus of the University of Michigan with a 40-year history of academic excellence. The campus has provided on-going staff support and studio and office space to the Voice/Vision Archive because it believes in the great historical value of this project, locally and within the international academic community, and also in the uniqueness of the project's approach.

Dr. Bolkosky and his colleagues in the Department of History have developed an impressive collection of Holocaust-related materials at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. The campus' Mardigian Library already possesses the Nuremberg Trial documents, and is one of the few sites in the U.S. to possess the proceedings of the Eichmann Trial.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn is a comprehensive university offering undergraduate and master's degrees in arts and sciences, education, engineering and computer science, and management. Founded in 1959, the University today boasts an enrollment of 8,500 students and 247 full-time instructional faculty. The University of Michigan-Dearborn is fully accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

## The Stories Must Be Told . . . and Heard

“Even before I had had time to really think things through, I realized that *we must not forget*. If all of us forgot, the same thing might happen again, in twenty or fifty or a hundred years.”

Simon Wiesenthal, quoted in *The Murderers Among Us*

Oral histories are a unique and vital piece of Holocaust history. As first-hand memories of those who were there, who suffered, and who lost family and friends, they offer insights that are more vivid and engaging than second-hand texts. It is imperative that Holocaust survivors are given forums for relating their accounts of those years, and that their stories are handled with utmost care.

Yet the challenges to a full hearing of those stories are daunting. For one thing, time is running out. Nearly sixty years have passed since the last Nazi concentration camp was liberated. As each year passes, the challenge for all memorial projects is the same: the time will soon come when there are no longer any living survivors of the Holocaust.

While the passing of this generation is an inevitability, the memories and stories of the witnesses to the Holocaust should not pass from memory. Their stories provide a necessary narrative that is sobering and instructive for the generations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

Just as all stories are incomplete unless they reach their intended audience, the Holocaust testimonies are most valuable when they reach as many hearers as possible. Although it is difficult (some say it is impossible) to arrive at a coherent “lesson” of the Holocaust, it is nevertheless critical that all of humanity know, remember and understand the experiences of the victims. “Loss remains the ‘lesson’ from the victims,” says Dr. Bolkosky. “But if we are to begin to understand the event and those who perpetrated it, one logical entry into that history is the victims who survived. They are the only people who know the depths of the effects, and they personalize the history for students and scholars alike.”

The challenge confronting any such collection of narratives, and especially oral histories, is to ensure that audiences find the material accessible, engaging, educational, accurate and user-friendly. Specifically, oral histories should be handled to ensure:

- as many testimonies as possible are made available to researchers and students
- the testimonies are rendered accurately so that they meet the highest standards of scholarship
- access to the material is not unnecessarily limited by geography or restrictive policies
- users can access the material in a wide a range of formats – print, audio, video, web content, as well as new communications vehicles as they are developed
- tools are developed that assist future listeners in their understanding of the material (such as curriculum, teacher training, and seminars)
- an ongoing commitment is made to keeping the collection relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of future audiences

## The Voice/Vision Archive: A Vital Record of Survivors' Voices

The Voice/Vision Archive at UM-Dearborn fulfills the historic and humanistic imperative to collect and broadcast these stories with unprecedented thoroughness and openness. The result is a resource that is highly valuable to Holocaust researchers, students and teachers around the world – and that is growing in value each year as the Archive's materials are made even more accessible.

### Project Goals

To ensure the academic value and usefulness of the Archive, we have established several key goals which make this project distinctive.

1. Our goal is to make the collection as meaningful for historical research as possible.
2. Our goal is to make the collection as thorough as possible, both as an historical narrative and in order to get as full a story as each participant is willing or able to tell.
3. Our goal is to promote use of, and accessibility to, the stories of survivors.
4. Our goal is to provide a rich historical and geographic context for each testimony, and to use the research tools of a major university to ensure historical accuracy.
5. Our goal is to continue to make the testimonies more useful to educators through participation in educational projects and curriculum development.
6. Our goal is to ensure the relevance and growth of this resource in the future through the presence of a full-time Curator.

### Methods

The Archive benefits from being attached to the University of Michigan-Dearborn, a supportive academic institution with rigorous standards. With the guidance of trained historians, great care is taken during the transcription process to determine the accuracy of places, names and dates, making the transcripts an important accompaniment to the tapes.

The Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive currently includes taped conversations with Jewish men and women who survived the Holocaust. For the purposes of this project, a survivor is defined as any European Jew who stayed alive from 1933-1945, including those who managed to flee Europe, were hidden, made their way to the Soviet Union, joined partisan groups, and/or managed to evade the Germans by hiding.

One of the distinctive aspects of the Archive is the way it has benefited from the personal relationships that Dr. Bolkosky has established with the survivors he interviews. Not only has he developed the format and structure for the survivor interviews, he has personally

conducted almost all the oral histories now contained in the UM-Dearborn collection. Dr. Bolkosky has been involved with the local Jewish community for the past thirty years. Survivors trust him as a scholar, friend, and confidante. And his experience as a historian of the Holocaust helps him to draw out personal stories in ways that lend themselves to the deeper telling of history.

Since the project began in 1981, over 200 audio and video taped oral interviews have been completed for over 650 hours of recorded histories. So far, 54 of these interviews have been transcribed – and as of October, 2004, 39 of the interviews are posted on the website.

It is through the transcription process that the names of towns and villages are confirmed and non-English terms are clarified to make the material more usable by both academic and lay researchers. This is a lengthy process – a four-hour interview may take up to 200 hours of work before the bound text is completed. Transcriptions of the testimonies are necessary for posting on the website – not every home computer has the necessary video and/or audio capabilities. And in some cases, when voices become so emotional that it becomes difficult for the listener to comprehend what is being said, annotated transcription becomes necessary. (Those without a home computer can access tapes and transcription directly through inter-library loan from their local library. The resources are catalogued in Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), an international library database that includes approximately 50 million titles owned by libraries worldwide).

This is one of only a very few projects that provides transcriptions of the oral histories, allows tapes off site, and maintains a website with complete testimonies, allowing 24-hour access 7 days a week. The importance of this cannot be overstated. It is a huge commitment for a survivor to share his/her story on tape, so our goal is to make this information as widely accessible as possible.

In addition to the website, the interviews are made available to the general public through:

- Institutional seminars, panel discussions, media events and classroom visits led by Voice/Vision scholars and survivors
- Presentations on effective Internet usage for teaching the Holocaust
- Lending library tapes, discs and transcripts (bound volumes) of survivors' testimonies, available at the University of Michigan-Dearborn's Mardigian Library
- Informational and teaching materials for use by community educators

As funds become available, each of the above outreach elements will be refined, enhanced and expanded, and new activities added. Among the planned activities that Voice/Vision scholars have outlined: a summer institute for southeastern Michigan high school teachers who are looking to add Holocaust studies to their curriculums.

## Leadership

The project is conducted under the direction of Sidney Bolkosky, Ph.D. In addition to serving as the Voice/Vision Archive Director, Dr. Bolkosky has been a professor of German history at UM-Dearborn for 31 years and is a nationally recognized scholar and expert on the Holocaust. Dr. Bolkosky served as a historical consultant for the film “Testimony” and for the exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He was also a consultant for Steven Spielberg’s *Visual History for the Shoah*. He has spoken at a number of international conferences on the Holocaust and is the author of four books and numerous articles. He was the principal co-author of *Life Unworthy of Life: A Holocaust Curriculum*, which has won praise from scholars in Holocaust Studies and was deemed a “preferred curriculum” by the National Diffusion Network of the U.S. Department of Education. An estimated 200,000 high school students have used the 18-lesson curriculum.

Curator Jamie Wraight is currently working on his doctoral dissertation in German history and is an invaluable resource for the Voice/Vision Archive. Jamie has overall responsibility for transcribing and publishing the transcripts of already-recorded interviews. (There is currently a backlog of 169 interviews.) In addition to overseeing the day-to-day work of the project, Jamie concentrates on making the information accessible to both the academic and non-academic communities. He prepares and enhances the interviews for the website, networks with other educational institutions, and manages more than a dozen community outreach activities each year. He is an exceptional resource for the community, providing information ranging from historical facts about the Holocaust to resources for families trying to learn what has happened to their lost relatives. Jamie also supervises three volunteers, who help edit and proofread transcripts.

## Target audiences

This archive is of particular use to (though by no means limited to):

- Students (especially those in high school, college and graduate school)
- Researchers, historians and scholars
- Psychologists
- Humanitarians
- Educational Institutions
- Religious Organizations
- Fraternal Societies
- Service Organizations
- Philanthropic Groups
- Youth and Seniors’ Clubs
- Corporations
- The General Public

## Evaluation

The Voice/Vision Archive has proven itself effective by two key measurements: it is popular with the general public as well as the scholarly community. We assess the value of the Voice/Vision program by volume and scope of use and by qualitative response from the academic community.

Our website has provided worldwide access to the Archive's resources, giving the project increased visibility and credibility. The site has received an estimated 2.5 million hits since 1998 – and in 2003 alone, the site received nearly one million hits, many from outside the U.S. That's a daily average of 2,500 hits, which proves that interest in the Holocaust, and in the experiences of Holocaust survivors, remains high throughout the world.

In addition, the scholarly quality of our survivor interviews is nationally recognized. Interview segments have been used in exhibits in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. and the Holocaust Memorial Center in suburban Detroit. Duplicates of all our tapes are sent to the archive at the USHMM and the Fortunoff Archive at Yale University. Text transcripts are also sent, as they become available.

Archive material is being used by a number of writers and scholars. Christopher Browning, the author of *The Origins of the Final Solution*, used the Archive testimonials to research labor camps. University of Michigan professor Hank Greenspan, the author of *Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, has used the testimonies from the Archive in his work. Jamie Wraight, the Curator of the Voice/Vision Archive, is incorporating material from the Archive into his doctoral dissertation in German history.

Looking to the future, we can measure our effectiveness in terms of quantity (a continually-increasing number of website "hits," a greater number of teacher-training opportunities) and quality, as leading Holocaust scholars continue to use our resources.

## Current and Future Funding

Website development was initiated through funding and encouragement from the Fisher Foundation, while the support of volunteers, individual donors, the University and others has allowed the Archive's work to continue. This includes in-kind support from UM-Dearborn, a grant from the Fisher Foundation, and generous donations to the endowed fund by Beverly Franzblau Baker and the Henry S. and Mala Dorfman Family Foundation.

On-going fundraising is carried out via several vehicles, including a fundraising brochure, a newsletter, and a year-end appeal. Through these channels, hundreds of supporters enable us to support a full-time Curator on a year-to-year basis. Donations have increased from year to year, and we plan to continue these efforts for the foreseeable future.



## Recognition

In gratitude for the gift of The Claims Conference, the University of Michigan-Dearborn will provide ample recognition. Our vehicles for recognizing donors includes:

- The Voice: Quarterly newsletter which is sent to all Voice/Vision supporters.
- Reporter: Monthly campus newspaper published by the Office of University Relations.
- Website: A special message will recognize the support of The Claims Conference on the project's website.
- Public Press Release: A press release will be prepared and sent to local media to announce the gift.
- Internal Press Release: A version of the press release will be posted on the University of Michigan-Dearborn's website.

## Conclusion

The history of the Holocaust is more than the individual stories of suffering. But without those stories, spoken as well as written, that history could fade into purely academic studies. As we have done from the start, we will continue to offer this material with integrity, professionalism, and sensitivity.

We anticipate it will take 8-10 years to fully transcribe the balance of the 200+ oral testimonies and prepare them for use on the Internet and other forums. But even after that task is accomplished, the work of the Archive will continue.

We have worked to grow our permanent endowed fund to a total of \$180,000. Our four-year goal is to grow the endowed fund to \$1.5 million, an amount that will generate sufficient income to support the Curator position, allow for further interviews and transcription, and provide funds for outreach activities.

Permanent funding will enable the Archive to support the Curator's position in perpetuity and allow us to maintain the collection in formats that will be widely accessed. This will require continual migration of the collection to the commonly used formats of the day.

**We request a grant of \$50,000 from the Rabbi Israel Miller Fund for Shoah Research, Education and Documentation of the Claims Conference. This grant – which can be directed to our endowed fund or given as current support – will provide a significant step forward as the Archive seeks a permanent funding base so we can preserve this important and unique collection for future generations.**

Outreach to researchers and to groups – particularly school groups – is essential if the interviews are to continue to impact Holocaust education. Our Curator is currently making contacts with educators to create the kinds of collaborations that will ensure that school-age children in our local communities have access to our resources.

Through the continued presence of a full-time, permanent Curator, the Archive will remain a dynamic, vibrant resource, responsive to the needs and learning styles of contemporary audiences. As the overseer of the Archive's detailed and sophisticated website, the Curator ensures that the material takes advantage of technological advances that enhance the viewer's experience and understanding of the Holocaust.

While UM-Dearborn holds itself to the academic standards of the University of Michigan, the campus is financially independent from Ann Arbor. We must supplement University support with independent fund-raising efforts if we are to maintain our Curator position.

**Your grant toward the Voice/Vision Archive will help us take significant strides forward in ensuring that the project remains in the capable hands of a trained Curator. Thank you for considering this request.**

#### Budget

The Voice/Vision Archive's annual budget is \$163,000. This includes the Curator's salary and benefits, community outreach projects, and programmatic expenses. A detailed breakdown of these annual expenses is included on the following page.

Support from foundations, individual donors at large and small levels, and grants from the University have helped the Archive meet its annual budget in recent years. To put the project on a more secure and permanent financial footing, the Archive has sought to build its endowed fund. Fundraising efforts have yielded \$180,000 in endowment donations to date. The goal is to raise \$1.5 million over the next four years, an amount that will allow the archive to enjoy a permanent income stream that will cover the annual budget.