PRIVATE LOSS, PUBLIC MEMORY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL EXHIBITION FACES OF LOSS

by

Rosa Maria Sevy Fua

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ABSTRACT

This investigation consisted of an ethnographic study of the memorial exhibition *Faces of Loss* mounted at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. The exhibit was based on scanned images of original pre-Holocaust pictures of the victims of the Holocaust whose families now live in Vancouver. Pictures of deceased relatives, confined for years in the privacy of survivors’ and second generations’ homes, were publicly displayed. In conducting this ethnography, the researcher became a participant observer during the production and public display of the exhibition. Data were generated through descriptive fieldnotes, personal journal entries, twenty-eight individual interviews that included Holocaust survivors, child survivors and second generation, and one group interview with nine child survivors. The data analysis suggests that bringing their private losses to the public arena proved therapeutic for the participants. The images displayed allowed them to honour the memory of their relatives and provided the participants with a forum to talk about their losses. The exhibition became a medium for the wider community to bear witness to the participants’ trauma, offering the Holocaust survivors and their children the healing experience associated with testimonial acts. The exhibition also engaged participants in collective remembrance and mourning practices. The display of visual images played a crucial role in facilitating these processes among the participants.

It follows that local Holocaust museums, as cultural places, could be turned into venues for facilitating memorial and therapeutic processes among Holocaust survivors and their children. By exploring the role of museums as forums for bringing private
losses into public space, this study sheds light on the therapeutic use of community-based settings for individuals and groups who have undergone psychosocial trauma.
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all those victims of the Holocaust, whose images I saw everyday, whose stories I learned during my time at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, whom I came to know through bearing witness on how much you are missed and loved. This work is my humble contribution to honour your memory.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On a rainy morning of April of 2005, as I engaged in what had become my daily ritual of lighting the memorial candle that stood at the entrance of the exhibition *Faces of Loss* at the VHEC, I kept thinking about the events of the day before when we had held the opening evening. The mental images of more than 150 Holocaust survivors with their children and grandchildren engaged together in an act of honouring and remembering their losses, talking about dead relatives and mourning them, kept coming back to me. I realized that this exhibition was appealing to a whole range of human experiences: the personal, the familial, the social, the spiritual, the cultural, the therapeutic. It reflected the interplay of these different realms and I realized that this was time to put into practice the learning derived from my long and challenging journey of navigating through an interdisciplinary landscape that had commenced with my moving to Canada. Most importantly, my being there, conducting research that dealt with Holocaust memory, trauma, communal spaces, was an expression of my personal transformation, my embracing of new interests, new passions, new ways of understanding myself, new identities.

Trained as a child psychologist in Mexico, in my clinical practice my universe was limited to my young clients’ families, schools, and occasionally to their immediate social or religious environments. My clients’ progress was a confirmation of my skills as a counselor and of the kind of work I was doing. Moving to Canada shifted my stable and predictable life, including my professional practice. As a Spanish-speaking immigrant, my first opportunity for work happened to be in the area of counseling Latin American
refugees at a neighborhood house. My skills and confidence as a counselor were challenged as I started to deal with the clients who would come to me and disclose their traumatic experiences. State terror, political persecution, torture, and assassination of family members by a repressive regime confronted me with a reality I had never contemplated before. Coming from the sheltered world of dealing with upper middle class Mexican families, whose reasons for seeking professional help were mainly related to family life transitions such as a new school, new sibling, or a family death in the worst cases, I was now dealing with issues of immense human suffering that resulted from state repression and terror, so I immersed myself in the literature on trauma and joined a local organization that dealt mainly with victims of torture and trauma. There I met other counselors and learned from them different approaches and strategies for dealing with some of the challenges I was encountering. Despite my efforts, I realized that my one-to-one approach in dealing with victims of trauma seemed fruitless. In one of my meetings with the settlement worker at the neighborhood house, as I shared my frustration at my inability to provide some help to a population which was so much in need of healing, she explained to me, “What you and other counselors, who work with people who have undergone trauma, need to understand is that the paradigm you bring with you of the structured therapy session most of the time does not work for us [she was also a refugee]. Refugees need something that resonates more with their daily realities.” What model do you suggest, I asked?” “I do not know,” she answered, “That could be something you might try to figure out, but my advice would be to put your psychology books aside.”
Driven by those words, I embarked on a journey that would have me become a full time student once again, passing through the departmental portals of history, counseling psychology and sociology. I soon learned that the concept of trauma now permeated the academic discourse and served as a key concept in our cultural and intellectual landscape, after having been confined for decades to the realm of psychiatry. As I was exposed to what Torpey (2003) describes as the “upsurge of concern for memory, history and ‘coming to terms with the past’” (p.1), I was drawn into the literature on Holocaust memory and testimony. The Holocaust, I came to understand, had become a template and yardstick to discuss and measure trauma in the scholarship that deals with the topic of trauma (Huyssen, 2003; Kal, 1996; Klein, 2000; Torpey, 2003).

My exposure to Holocaust issues brought me to a new understanding of my own Jewish identity, for many years dormant as my uprooting from my homeland brought along an uprooting of my sense of belonging to a Jewish community. Coming from a family where no members met their death in the Holocaust, my readings on the Holocaust impressed a stamp on my inner world as it resonated with my personal Jewish identity and with my abiding interest in working with survivors of trauma. I realized that I wanted to contribute to the reflections that theorists and scholars have offered on the process of reckoning with the aftermath of this traumatic event and to find new ways of facilitating healing outside the traditional therapeutic setting, which in my own past experience in working with refugees, had been unsuccessful.

As I started reviewing the literature on Holocaust trauma, I came across the writings of psychotherapists who argued that in order to better help this population, the
therapeutic alternatives would have to go beyond the traditional therapy paradigm (Fogelman, 1988; Hass, 1995; Kellermann, 2001). Fogelman’s work confirmed my own experience of working with trauma survivors, as she argues that “communal trauma of the Holocaust could not be resolved by mental health professionals in the traditional patient-therapist paradigm” (p. 101) and concludes that “alternative and innovative therapeutic interventions” have to be designed to suit communal needs (p.101). Along the same line, Kellermann’s (2001) research points out the difficulties embedded in offering counseling or psychotherapy services to Holocaust survivors as many survivors do not want to be treated as psychiatric patients and only seek mental health professionals when their need for symptom alleviation becomes pressing. Kellermann suggests as one alternative to the therapeutic setting the engagement of survivors in commemorative practices, positing that activities such as passing the legacy of the Holocaust to the next generation have proved useful in helping Holocaust survivors achieve some degree of resolution of their traumatic past (p. 206).

In the 70’s mental health practitioners in different parts of the world started using the “testimony method” (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983) as a therapeutic tool in the treatment of trauma. In Herman’s groundbreaking book, *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), the author writes about the trauma recovery process. The author highlights the therapeutic function of giving testimony and argues that “testimony has both a private dimension which is confessional… and a public aspect, which is political” (p.181). Testimony gives a new larger dimension to the person’s private experience since many survivors of trauma seek a resolution of their traumatic experience through sharing with the community their traumatic stories (Herman, 1992). Herman notes that the sharing of
their story with a wider community also enables trauma survivors to restore their sense of connection with the community. In other words, it is the passing from the private to the public that enables survivors to work on aspects of their recovery process.

As I immersed myself in the literature on trauma, I realized that the mental health practitioners’ work had laid the ground for the use of therapeutic alternatives outside the scope of traditional therapy, mainly through the practice of engaging survivors of trauma, specifically Holocaust survivors, in giving testimonies and engaging in memorialization projects.

In regard to Holocaust survivors’ participation in Holocaust remembrance projects, with the moving of this event into the foreground of the cultural landscape during the past three decades, Holocaust remembrance has acquired many different forms: individual, community, groups, national, and international. The emergence of Holocaust memory has led to a surge in public commemoration and planning of national commemorative spaces. Relevant scholarship has focused on the memorial function of Holocaust museums, stressing how these museums have become sites where survivors and their relatives can pray, light candles and engage in collective acts of remembrance (Linenthal, 1995; Patraka, 1996; Wollaston, 2005; Young, 1994). This role that Holocaust museums have taken allows them to become gathering places where public ceremonies and shared remembrance can take place. Museum spaces have thus become a venue for enabling private mourning to become public. However, despite the potential therapeutic value of these practices, the literature stresses the incomplete mourning process that commonly occurs with Holocaust survivors (Bar- On, 1998; Danieli, 1998; Hass, 1995; Kellermann, 2001).
As I became absorbed in the literature that dealt with the issue of Holocaust survivors, I realized that the scholarship generated in different disciplines had provided me with insights on practices within their discipline that had the potential to help trauma survivors deal with their past; yet something was missing. I could not figure out how to integrate these new understandings derived from my readings in different fields. As a sociology graduate student, I soon found myself gravitating toward the topic of the politics of reparation, focusing on symbolic reparations with groups that have been wronged, particularly commemorative projects such as memorials and museums.

In 2005, at a museum conference, an encounter with the director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC) pointed the way for me. She told me about an exhibition that she was planning to mount at the Centre and invited me to participate in it. The exhibition consisted in mounting a memorial exhibition at the Holocaust Centre where members of the local community would be asked to submit photographs of their relatives who perished during the Holocaust. The project, which was being curated by the director of the VHEC, represented the integration of all those elements I had read about: a memorial exhibition where the community of Holocaust survivors and their children actively participate by submitting photos of their deceased relatives which had been hidden for years in the private realm of the home. This combined two elements that have been highlighted in the literature for their therapeutic value: 1.) a testimonial aspect – testifying, through the displayed images of their dead relatives, what the Nazi regime did to them and their relatives- and 2.) a communal project of collective remembering and mourning.
I jumped at the opportunity to be involved in this project. I realized that a research project based on this exhibition had the potential to address some of the existing gaps in the literature. The literature on Holocaust museums stresses how these museums are simultaneously both museums and memorials. Relevant scholarship examines the function of Holocaust museums in providing a site for collective mourning (Hass, 1995; Huyssen, 1994). Hass (1995) explains how in the absence of tombstones, Holocaust museums can function as bereavement sites. Although the existing literature denotes the role of Holocaust museums as sites for both remembrance and mourning, there have been no empirical studies that explored this dual function of museums for Holocaust survivors and their families.

A contemporary theme in some national Holocaust museums’ narrative is that of presenting the Holocaust “with a concrete face” (Lassig & Pohl, 2007) through the use of pre-Holocaust photographs in their collections. This exhibition added a novel element to this approach by incorporating the local community’s family pre-war photographs into its display. Although in recent years, significant theoretical work has been done on the topic of pre-Holocaust family photography (Crownshaw, 2007; Hirsch, 1997, 1999, 2001; Levitt, 2007; Liss, 1998) and their relevance in museum exhibitions as vehicles to give back names and identities to those defaced in the Holocaust (Liss, 1998), none has addressed the impact of an exhibition of this kind on viewers, particularly on those viewers who are related to the victims displayed in the images. Having an exhibition of this kind in a local community centre also gave me an opportunity to explore the importance of local museums in engaging their community members to remember and work through their losses. Since national Holocaust museums have been the ones
which, so far, have mounted pre-Holocaust photograph exhibitions, the potential for local Holocaust museums to engage in such initiatives has been relatively neglected. Although the scholarship that deals with local museums’ engagement with their communities has been prolific, there is a gap in the literature on the role that local museums can play in enabling community members who have gone through massive trauma to work through their losses.

As I started meeting with the curator of the exhibition and her team, it became clear to me that embracing this initiative as my research project would challenge me to fuse my diverse academic background as well as my past experiences. I soon realized that the multiplicity of aspects involved in this project required a correspondingly diverse and cross-disciplinary approach. In contrast to former research projects I had engaged in during my previous academic experience, this one would challenge me to move beyond the boundaries of any one discipline and use a multidisciplinary framework instead. I decided to engage in this investigation with the aim of exploring the impact, for Holocaust survivors and their children, of participating in an exhibition where the museum space would be turned into a forum for giving visual testimony to their losses, for engaging a broader audience to bear witness to their losses, and for participating in collective mourning practices.

The purpose of this study is then, to explore what is cited in the literature as a need to provide therapeutic alternatives outside the clinical setting in order to help Holocaust survivors fulfill their desire to honour the memory of their deceased relatives, and to deal with their traumatic memories and incomplete mourning processes. This study investigates whether cultural spaces such as museums can be used as
therapeutic venues to enable Holocaust survivors and their children to cope with their traumatic memories. By investigating the role of museums as public forums for trauma survivors, this study can shed some light on the therapeutic use of public space for populations who have undergone massive trauma.

The central question that guides this research is: What are the meanings for the survivors and their children of participating in an exhibition that brings their private losses into the public sphere? In order to explore and attempt to understand and describe how the Holocaust survivors and their children experienced and responded to the exhibition *Faces of Loss*, I employed an ethnographic approach in wide use within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Miller, Hengt, & Su-hua, 2003, p. 219). I immersed myself in the day-to-day activities of the VHEC and entered into close and relatively prolonged interaction with the Holocaust survivors and their children. I see my research as the product of a “dialogue” between the participants and myself (Angrosino & Mays 2000, p. 675).

Having provided my rationale, my overall objective, central question and research paradigm, the text that follows is the outcome of my academic endeavor and personal journey as I bore witness to the losses of so many Holocaust survivors, and to the broad range of memories and feelings arising in them as they brought their private losses into the public sphere.
In the last twenty five years, the Holocaust has become a central cultural phenomenon and focal point of scholarly and public discourse. The Holocaust has had a profound impact upon theorists, scholars, and artists, among others, and has inspired a whole body of literature written by specialists in many fields (Kweit & Matthaus, 2004, p. xi). Klein (2000) explains this as the Holocaust’s “privileged philosophical place” (p.139), in contemporary society. Klein summarily defines the Holocaust as “the great trauma of modernity” (p.139), and, as such, the study of this event has confronted scholars with issues related to its understanding, memorialization and representation. As Friedlander (1992) writes, “we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an ‘event at the limits’” (p. 3). The study of the Holocaust poses central questions on modes of remembering and representing this event.

In this chapter, I discuss the trajectory of Holocaust remembrance, focusing on the emergence of Holocaust consciousness and its intricate connection with remembrance practices which have become central in shaping Holocaust memory. Following that, I provide a description of Holocaust museums as privileged spaces for institutionalizing the Holocaust, and I finish with the approaches these museums have taken for presenting the Holocaust to their viewers, with an emphasis on the use of pre-Holocaust photography as a means to personalize the Holocaust.
Holocaust Consciousness

In discussing the emergence of the Holocaust in contemporary consciousness, much of scholarship is centered on two interwoven issues: the analysis of specific factors and events that have enabled the Holocaust to permeate the cultural landscape and enter the public consciousness in different countries, and the examination of how particular national and political interests and needs in these countries have shaped the representation and memory of the Holocaust. Although much of the literature focuses on similar key events and factors, the particular circumstances of the national settings have made these events unfold differently.

The factors scholars have focused their attention on are: political events (such as Eichmann’s trial, the Six-Day War), popular cultural phenomena (such as the miniseries Holocaust, first shown in 1978, The diary of Anne Frank, first published in English translation in 1952, and its theatrical production in 1956, the film Schindler's list in 1994), and political-educational initiatives (such as the creation of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, opened to the public in 1993) which have contributed to place the Holocaust at the centre of some countries’ historical consciousness (Berger, 2002; Karlsson, 2007; Levy & Sznaider 2006; Linenthal,1995; Novick, 1999).

Different authors give certain events more relevance than others; for example, Friedlander (1993), Huyssen (2003), Novick (1999), and Wieviorka (2006) have placed great emphasis on the telecasting of the Holocaust miniseries in triggering the discussion of the Holocaust in the United States and Europe, including Germany. In Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews, Friedlander (1993) discusses the reception and impact of the Holocaust series on the German audience and cites how, because of the strong emotional responses triggered, it has been considered as a
turning point in Germany’s confrontation with its Nazi past (p.7). In the same vein, Novick (1999) points out that the airing of the miniseries Holocaust constituted “the most important moment in the entry of the Holocaust into general American consciousness” (p. 209). However, there is a lack of consensus among scholars about which event has priority over others in bringing the Holocaust into the foreground. For example, in discussing specifically the creation of Holocaust consciousness in the American public, Rosenfeld (1997) argues that “for millions of young Americans in particular, the Holocaust is first made known and vividly personalized in the image of Anne Frank” (p.124).

Public remembering of the Holocaust differs from one country to another. Rabinbach (1997) notes that state-sponsored narratives of the Holocaust vary notably in each country since they reflect particular circumstances they seek to commemorate. Most of the literature that deals with Holocaust remembrance is focused on Holocaust memory in Germany, Israel and the United States due to the fact that in these countries Holocaust remembrance was intimately linked to particular political agendas and national initiatives. The next section reviews the literature on the emergence of Holocaust consciousness and remembrance in these countries and in Canada. Embedded in the discussion is the impact that the key events discussed above have had in each national setting.

**Holocaust Remembrance in the United States**

Lindenthal’s seminal work, *Preserving Memory*, discusses how the memory of the Holocaust has been constructed in the United States. His analysis is centered on how the Holocaust has become part of the official memory of the United States after a period
of invisibility during the postwar years (Linenthal, 1995). The author contends that the boundaries of the Holocaust memory have passed from being confined to the American Jews to becoming a “national trust” (p. 5). Linenthal (1995) traces the events that brought the Holocaust to the foreground and agrees with other scholars that events such as the story of Anne Frank, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, and the Six-Day War played an important role in bringing Holocaust imagery to the American public. This author’s focus is on the institutionalization of the Holocaust memory through the erection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He argues that the creation of the museum served three main purposes other than the political message to support the State of Israel: to create a museum, a memorial and an educational centre whose functions were to tell the story, to inculcate the values of democracy, pluralism and tolerance, and to mourn the victims of the Holocaust. Linenthal’s book throws light on how the Holocaust remembrance passed from the periphery to the centre of national consciousness.

Novick (1999), in his book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, analyzes how the emergence of Holocaust memory has been intimately related to political and social concerns. This author contends that the Holocaust has been used politically as national self-congratulation since it shows what never would have happened in the United States and celebrates the American way of life. In doing this, it gives a sense of moral order to the larger society ( p.234). Novick argues that the Holocaust has become the touchstone of moral and political discourse in the United States. Moreover, according to Novick, the Holocaust has been thought of as an American memory, not just as a Jewish memory. In the same line of thought, Rosenfeld (1997) stressed how the
Holocaust entered the American consciousness because it resonated with America’s ethos. Therefore, through representing the Holocaust in a way that matched American values by promoting “a tendency to individualize, heroize, moralize, idealize and universalize” (p. 123), the Holocaust entered the American culture because it was something Americans could understand on their own terms.

**Holocaust Remembrance in Germany**

Scholars have devoted substantial attention to the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in postwar reactions in Germany and other European countries by examining how the Holocaust has moved “into the very centre of the European historical culture” (Karlsson, 2003, p.15). In discussing the events that have enabled this Holocaust consciousness to emerge, Bodemann (2002) argues that Eichmann’s trial fundamentally affected public consciousness in Germany since it shifted the emphasis of German war crimes from a variety of victims to re-centering them on the Jewish victims (p. 47). Shafir (2002) takes a different perspective on this issue and contends that it was the screening of the *Holocaust* series that had a major impact on the German public (p.129).

In past years, a new generation of German scholars has been devoted to the study of the cultural significance of the Holocaust remembrance in Germany. Pohl (2004) argues that the Nazi crimes are situated at “the centre of German historical consciousness” (p. 22) and notes how the Holocaust has acquired a central place in German culture: in the arts, in the media, and in education. With the motto *Vergangenheitsbewatigung* (coming to terms with the past), Germans have made Holocaust commemoration and remembrance a key aspect in their daily lives. Several
scholars have linked Holocaust consciousness in Germany with political agendas. Karlsson (2003) explains the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in Germany and other countries in Europe as an instrumental political project underscoring its central role in Europe’s integration project. He asserts that the Holocaust became a “useful concept to tie the absolute evil of history together with a good, united Europe of the future” (p.18).

Friedlander (1993) affirms that the history and memory of the Nazi period are intimately linked to the manipulations and revisions of historical consciousness stemming out of new political trends in Germany. This author argues that the representation of the Nazi past has a present dimension of vital importance for Germans, and the debate over the Nazi past currently seen in Germany is mainly ideological and more related to present day German political options than to history. On the same note, Maier’s book, *The Unmasterable Past*, discusses the debate that arose among German historians, centered on what the German nation should be after the Third Reich. His analysis focuses on how the approaches around the Holocaust in West Germany have been connected to political antagonisms between conservatives and liberals (Maier, 1988). Maier (1988) explains Jurgen Habermas’ liberal view that even those born afterwards bear responsibility, because they “have grown up in a context of life [Lebensform] in which that was possible” (as cited in Maier, 1988, p. 57) Therefore, Habermas emphasizes the obligation to remember and suggests that the Holocaust be as fundamental to Germany’s identity as it is to Israel’s (as cited in Maier, 1988, p. 59).

Post-1945 German society has been actively coping with its Nazi past. During the past twenty five years, the Holocaust has been very much present in German public
life through its insertion in academic conferences and the school curriculum, by the creation of several Berlin Holocaust memorials and monuments and the Berlin Jewish Museum, and by the establishment of the Remembrance Day for Victims of the National-Socialist Regime. Trommler (2003) states that the recognition of Nazi crimes and the memorialization of the Holocaust constitutes part of the new German identity (p. 140).

**Holocaust Remembrance in Israel**

In Israel, the Holocaust attained a prominent position in how the newly founded state wrestled with its identity. Different scholars have written on how the imperative to remember the Holocaust has been a centerpiece in the construction and narrative of the Jewish state. Friedlander (1993) has examined how the Shoah was integrated in early Israeli consciousness. He explains this as the relation between catastrophe (*shoah*) and redemption (creation of Jewish state), and argues that the Shoah, a catastrophe like no other in Jewish history, led to a quintessential historical redemption which was the birth of the state of Israel (p. 121).

Nonetheless, despite the initial prominence of the Holocaust in the founding of the state of Israel, Holocaust discourse in this country passed through a period of silence. Different scholars have tried to explain this period of silence as a need for the nascent state to pursue a narrative of renewal and strengthening of the state with no space in the public sphere for the memory of the Holocaust (Brog, 2003; Ofer, 2000; Zertal, 2005). Brog (2003) argues that in the ideology of the newly created state, the values and symbols that were cultivated by the state were those of heroism and sacrifice; the military hero figure was imbued with the values of national patriotism.
Within this narrative of renewal and power, the narrative of suffering and victimization brought by Holocaust survivors was pushed to the periphery (p. 70).

In his seminal piece, *The Texture of Memory*, Young (1993) contends that the Holocaust has been remembered in Israel according to the state’s ideals, myths and diverse political needs. Therefore, he argues that at a time when the early leaders in Israel found themselves fully engaged in the state building task there was “little reason to recall the Holocaust beyond its direct link to the new state” (p. 210). Levy and Sznaider (2006) explain the absence of Holocaust memory in the public sphere during the postwar years as the need of the young state to distance itself from the diaspora Jews’ history of suffering and a narrative of passivity, which depicted them as allowing themselves to be led like “sheep to the slaughter” (p. 87).

Nevertheless, this lack of an appropriate political and cultural framework for incorporating Holocaust remembrance into the national consciousness changed in the 1960s. According to some scholars, Eichmann’s trial was a turning point that allowed the Holocaust memory to emerge in the public sphere (Gouri, 2004; Levy & Sznaider, 2006; Ofer, 2000; Zertal, 2005). Gouri (2004) argues that before Eichmann’s trial, the Holocaust was nowhere and everywhere but that Eichmann’s trial obliged Israelis to confront this event and compelled the newly created nation to undergo a process of self-reckoning and search for its identity (p.154). Along this line, Zertal (2005) suggests that Eichmann’s trial became “a symbol of Israel’s asserted sovereignty and power” (p.96). In that way, the Holocaust permeated the public sphere. However, this author notes that there was a new discourse of the Holocaust emerging, rooted in a perspective of power and justice. The message conveyed in this new discourse was that “Jewish blood would
never be abandoned nor defenseless again” (p. 96). This emergence of Holocaust consciousness is very well described in Appelfeld’s autobiographical text as “the awakening” – a rebirth in which the memory of the Holocaust is experienced as a restoration, an awakening from a state of self-alienation to a process of restoration, “restoring ourselves to ourselves” (Appelfeld, 1994, p.152). Levy and Sznaider (2006) argue that Eichmann’s trial was a centerpiece in this shift that directed public attention to the Holocaust since the trial as a major media event constituted for many people their first introduction to the topic. Moreover, the authors argue that the extensive media coverage allowed the Holocaust to escape the “boundaries of individual experience” (p. 96) and enter the public domain. From Eichmann’s trial on, Holocaust memory became an integral component of the official state memory culture and significant scholarly research has been done on how the Holocaust has become a centerpiece at all levels in Israel’s discourse. Tossavainen (2003), for example, explains how the Holocaust constitutes a pillar in contemporary Jewish identity and the collective Israeli understanding of the past (p. 76).

Various scholars have highlighted the instrumentalization of the Holocaust to further political agendas and its centrality in Israeli political discourse (Hertzog, 2007; Karlsson, 2007; Lentin, 2004). Lentin (2004) examined the centrality of the Shoah in Israeli political culture and consciousness. He argues that the Shoah has been transformed into a “political ideology, a code” (p. 11) and adds that the Shoah has been used to justify political acts (p. 12). On this same line, Hertzog (2007) contends that in both left and right wing Israeli political parties, activists and politicians have used the Shoah to serve opposing political goals. He discusses how Shoah metaphors have
played an important role in framing issues such as the withdrawal from the Gaza strip and state policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (p. 60). However, as other scholars such as Brog argue, despite the politics of instrumentalization of the Shoah, it does exist as a “component of the collective memory of Israeli society” (Brog 2003, p. 77).

**Holocaust Remembrance in Canada**

Bialystok (2000), in his book *Delayed Impact*, discusses the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in Canada. He states that in Canada, just as in other countries, the “interest in the Holocaust was late in coming” (p.6). Bialystok, along the same line of other scholars (Novick, 1999; Friedlander, 1993; Huyssen, 2003; Wierviorka, 2006), argues that the showing of the miniseries *Holocaust*, in 1978, was a “catalyst in raising awareness about the catastrophe” (p.177). This author notes that the explosion of coverage about this event in the popular media, along with the proliferation of novels, memoirs, and scholarly work, aroused growing public interest in the Holocaust. In Canada, the publication of *None is too Many*, in 1982, which revealed Canada’s inexcusable immigration policies during the Nazi era, provoked a wide response, with the authors, Abella and Troper, appearing in national news programs and at cultural events across the country. In addition to these events, Bialystok argues that Canadians became more aware of the Holocaust by the publicity generated through trials of Holocaust deniers and the controversies over suspected Nazi war criminals in the country (p. 219). He concludes that the “Holocaust entered into the consciousness of Canadians between 1975 and 1985” (p. 219).
Bialystok explores the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in Canadian Jews. He argues that during the immediate post-war years (1945-1960), the Holocaust had a low priority on the agenda of the Canadian Jewish communities; and that did not change until the late 1960’s (p. 8). During the 1950’s, the Canadian Jewish Congress passed resolutions to encourage the broader Jewish communities to attend the annual commemoration service for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This commemorative event had begun in Canada in 1944, however, Canadian Jews, other than survivors, did not show interest in this commemoration (p.167). It was not until the late sixties and early seventies that the Holocaust gradually emerged in the Canadian Jewish communities’ memory landscape. The Holocaust was included in the community’s collective memory and became a symbol of their ethnic identity and what “it meant to be a Jew in Canada” (p. 220).

Schober’s (2001) research examines how the Holocaust was integrated into the Canadian Jewry consciousness through Holocaust commemoration practices. She argues that “the trail of commemoration” (p.151) of the Holocaust began in 1943, at its very peak. Schober discusses the annual Holocaust commemorative practices that were organized on a local basis in cities across Canada. The author notes that as Holocaust survivors settled in Canada, specifically Toronto and Montreal, they organized themselves in their own landsmanshaft, which were mutual aid associations that also enabled survivors to engage in Holocaust commemoration practices. Holocaust survivors organized annual memorials which usually featured memorial prayers, a candle-lighting ceremony and a speaker. Giberovitch’s (1994) work also examines Holocaust remembrance practices in the post-war era in Montreal. She discusses
survivors’ landsmanshaft and argues that “a most urgent concern” (p. 77) for survivors who joined these organizations was the commemoration of their family members who had perished during the Nazi regime. This author argues that survivors “saw these commemorations as sacred duties and obligations” (p. 77). The work of these scholars shows that despite the relevance of these memorial events for the survivors, before the 1970’s these commemorative ceremonies did not attract the wider Jewish community. Bialystok notes that in these commemorations, most of the attendees and participants were survivors (p.168).

The literature on Holocaust remembrance in Canada notes that by the early 1970’s this annual commemoration had become a fixture in the calendar of the Jewish communities across the country (Bialystok, 2000; Schober, 2001; Tulchinksy, 1989). Bialystok explains how by that time, Holocaust commemoration events drew large audiences in different cities such as Toronto, London, Hamilton and Ottawa, among others (p.170). Furthermore, this author notes that, by the mid-1970’s, the Canadian Jewish Congress created a permanent committee, the National Holocaust Remembrance Committee with the objective of coordinating local programs to further Holocaust education and commemoration and, thereby, create a memory of the Holocaust among Canadian Jews (p.181).

Krolik-Hennenberg (2002), in her paper, “At the Western Development Museum,” examines how the Holocaust became central in the small Jewish community of Saskatoon. She argues that, in Saskatoon, during the post-war years, there was a pervasive silence around the Holocaust, and survivors remained separated from the rest of the Jewish community. With the creation of the Holocaust Remembrance Committee
by the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1974, the relationship between survivors and the
general community in Saskatoon changed as the “the appropriation of the Holocaust as
a defining point of ethnic identity by Canadian Jewry was underway” (Abella &
Bialystock as cited in Krolik-Hennenberg, 2002, p.117). The first Holocaust Memorial
program was organized in 1982 at the Saskatoon Jewish Community Centre. Krolik-
Hennenberg argues that, unlike other memorial events across the country, the impetus
came from the community leadership itself who responded to Canadian Jewish
Congress appeals to hold that event (p.118).

Tulchinsky’s book, *Branching out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish
Community*, describes the Canadian Jewish community’s awareness of the Holocaust
during the decades of the 1980’s and 1990’s. He argues that by this time, the Holocaust
had become a “prominent feature of Jewish life in Canada” (p. 322), and part of the
Canadian Jewry collective identity (Tulchinsky, 1998).

**Holocaust Remembrance in Vancouver**

Very little has been written about Holocaust remembrance practices in
Vancouver. Schober's research provides a detailed analysis on how the local
community has engaged in Holocaust commemoration (Schober, 2001). She writes that
Holocaust survivors who settled in Vancouver had a different experience from their
counterparts in other large cities in Canada. They did not organize themselves in their
own mutual-aid organizations but joined the already existing Jewish organizations.
Gerber’s research examined how Holocaust survivors got involved and integrated in
local Jewish organizations (Gerber, 1989). This author concludes that it was when
Holocaust survivors joined the wide variety of Jewish organizations of their host society
that, “they [survivors] achieved positions of equality with the host community and a chance to make their special voice heard” (p. 83).

Schober (2001) argues that survivors’ early integration into Jewish life in Vancouver prompted them to bring the Holocaust commemoration forward to the broader Jewish community. Holocaust commemoration in Vancouver, as the mainstream Jewish community’s event, began in 1952 with the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial evening. The memorial was organized by a committee whose members were Holocaust survivors and was sponsored by the Jewish Community Council. The program for the event consisted in the ceremonial lighting of six candles, a moment of silence, and the chanting of Kaddish, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead, among its main features. This commemoration, however, did not succeed in engaging the wider community until 1956 when it became a mainstream community event sponsored by the two main Jewish organizations, the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Community Council (p. 65). These two sponsoring organizations appealed to the entire Jewish community to attend. At this early stage, the commemoration did not go unchallenged by some members of the community who questioned the need to commemorate the Holocaust or resented the effort to stir those memories. Nonetheless, by the mid 1970’s, this event had become institutionalized and part of the community’s calendar (Schober, 2001).

In the years that followed, Holocaust survivors called for the establishment of a permanent memorial for the victims and for educating the wider public on the Holocaust. This eventually lead to the creation of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre which
will be discussed in more detail when I describe the venue for this research project (see methodology chapter).

“Cosmopolitan Holocaust Memory”

Holocaust remembrance is not confined to Israel, Germany or the United States. Significant scholarly work has been devoted to understanding the pervasive and multinational aspects of Holocaust remembrance. Particularly relevant is the work of Levy and Sznaider (2002) who argue that, alongside the national memories, there is a shared memory about the Holocaust which the authors call “cosmopolitan memory” (p. 88), and which they see as the result of globalization (Levy & Sznaider, 2002).

Cosmopolitan memory has become both political and cultural, providing a major moral point of reference for other traumatic histories (Levy & Sznaider, 2002, 2006). The transformation of the Holocaust into a measuring stick for international politics has been the focus of other scholars as well. Huyssen (2003) discusses how the Holocaust has become a universal trope that allows Holocaust memory to act as a prism through which other genocides are examined (p.14). Torpey (2001) argues that the Holocaust has become a template in the contemporary consciousness of catastrophe. According to this author, the Holocaust has become the principal legacy of the twentieth century with respect to the way we think about the past and a template for universal human rights agendas (Torpey, 2001, p. 341). Along these lines, Alexander (2004) examines how the Holocaust, as a specific, situated historical event, has become a universalized symbol of evil and human suffering. This author argues that over the last fifty years, the Holocaust has been transformed – “free floating rather than situated – universal rather than
particular” (p.197). As a generalized symbol, the Holocaust has been re-defined as a traumatic event for the entire humankind (Alexander, 2004).

Private Holocaust Remembrance

In discussing the public Holocaust remembrance, scholars who have studied this phenomenon warn against the assumption that the public silence that prevailed after the Holocaust reflected a lack or inability to remember privately. Family members of deceased Holocaust victims have periodically engaged in some form of personal and community commemoration. A significant body of literature is devoted to the analysis of Holocaust remembrance in the private sphere (Brog, 2003; Levy & Sznaider, 2006; Ofer, 2000; Wierviorka, 2006). This body of literature clarifies that, for instance, in Israel, Holocaust survivors have always engaged in commemorative practices despite the government’s scant attention to the Holocaust. Regardless of the lack of centrality of Holocaust commemorations in the new state’s public agenda, the literature points out how survivors engaged in projects such as publication of memorial books (Yisker books), erection of memorial plaques in synagogues and cemeteries, and the organization of their own ceremonies of remembrance (Brog 2003; Ofer, 2000; Tossavainen, 2003; Wieviorka, 2006).

In the absence of a framework for Holocaust remembrance, Holocaust memories had to remain marginal and confined to the private space, closed to the outside world. Wierviorka (2006) argues that Holocaust memories were able to penetrate the public sphere because there was a political climate and an ethos that allowed society to be receptive to those memories (p.144). Ostensibly, it is not until there is social demand for
these kinds of memories that the individual and group memories are allowed to emerge and take root in the public arena.

As the Holocaust has moved into the foreground of the cultural landscape, a great amount of scholarly work has focused on the forms of Holocaust remembrance. Indeed, Holocaust remembrance has acquired many different forms: individual, communal, group, national, and international. However, as Levy and Szneider (2006) argue, there are no clear cut divisions between these different forms of remembrance (p.133). The emergence of Holocaust memory has led to a surge in public commemoration and planning of national commemorative spaces. The next section will discuss the issues of Holocaust representation and the emergence of Holocaust national museums focusing on two such museums: Yad Vashem in Israel, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, each serving as major vehicles for representing and narrating this event.

Canada, in contrast to other countries such as the United States, Israel, and Germany which have linked the Holocaust to their national and political agendas, has not developed a national museum to shape Holocaust memory. Local Holocaust centres in major Canadian cities have been the repositories of Holocaust remembrance and education programs. Yet, despite the pivotal role that local Holocaust centres play in furthering Holocaust remembrance and education, there is very little research on this topic. This study, focused on a local Holocaust centre in Vancouver, aims to contribute to the scarce scholarship about local Holocaust centres and their shaping of the local community’s Holocaust memory.
Holocaust Representation

The emergence of Holocaust consciousness has been accompanied by the proliferation of material markers such as museums, archives, monuments and memorials. These cultural productions constitute some of the ways in which social actors try to embody memories. According to Nora (1989), memory relies on the visibility of the image. He emphasizes that “Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects…” (p. 9).

However, there are inherent tensions in using material markers to represent and shape Holocaust memory. A whole body of scholarship has been developed to address the question of how the Holocaust can be represented. There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the representability or unrepresentability of traumatic events. On the one hand, film director Claude Lanzmann argues that the Holocaust “erects around itself in a circle of flames, a limit which cannot be breached because a certain absolute is intransmissable” (Lanzmann, as cited in Rothberg, 2000, p. 233). On the other hand, LaCapra (2003) argues that an exclusive emphasis on the unrepresentable may divert attention from that which may indeed be represented or reconstructed with respect to traumatic limit events (p.14). The core issue here is how a post-Holocaust world can accommodate and memorialize this event. Felman and Laub (1992) argue that the Shoah is an “event without witness” (p. 232), and Primo Levi (1989) reminds that “we survivors are not the true witnesses, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it.” (p. 83). Despite such arguments asserting the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, Friedlander (1992) and Lentin (2004), among others, argue that although the Holocaust is an event that challenges conventional
representational categories, it is “accessible to representation and interpretation” (Lentin, 2004, p. 2).

**Museums as Sites of Holocaust Memory**

The issues of Holocaust representation have become particularly problematic when it comes to Holocaust museums. Scholars have raised questions of whether some modes of representation are more appropriate than others. Holocaust museums have taken different stances regarding this issue, and while some have decided to be as graphic as possible, others have approached the horrors of the Holocaust more tangentially (Wollaston, 2005). Epstein and Hope (2001) state that in representing the Holocaust in museum exhibitions, there exists a paradox since “brutality must be shown and told, and all effort to show and tell only minimize and betray; the inheritors of loss are at once commanded to shape loss and forbidden from shaping it” (p.7).

Nonetheless, due to the privileged position in conveying specific cultural meanings and values that museums possess, Holocaust museums have become one of the main venues for narrating the Nazi genocide and institutionalizing Holocaust memory. Over the past twenty years hundreds of museums and institutions dedicated to teaching and remembering the Holocaust have been created worldwide and this has resulted in what Young (2004) calls the “Holocaust museums boom” (p.249). Hoffman (2004), too, notes that Holocaust memorials and museums are ever more part of the “post-Holocaust topography” (p.156). This growth is inversely linked to the decrease in survivors as they age and die with the memories they carry. As the survivors’ generation shrinks, its place is being taken by members of the post-Holocaust generation who consider themselves “the guardians of the Holocaust” (Hoffman, 2004, p. xv).
Nevertheless, as Kusno (1997) argues, the responsibility for sustaining Holocaust memory is passing from individuals and communities to institutions. We live in an era where museums have become “genuine places of remembrance” (Brubeck, 2001).

A growing body of interdisciplinary work has analyzed the role of Holocaust museums as sites of memory and knowledge production. Young’s analysis of Holocaust museums illustrates how the kind of memories these museums generate are as various as the sites themselves since they relate to particular national political agendas and needs. Young (2004) writes, “every state has its own institutional forms of remembrance” (p. 249). Young’s work underscores how museums reflect national, religious and community needs.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)

Linenthal’s work, *Preserving Memory*, astutely analyzes the role played by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in institutionalizing Holocaust memory in the United States (Linenthal, 1995). Linenthal’s examination of the political, ideological, and logistic struggles that emerged in the process of conceptualizing and creating this museum, throws light on the complexities involved in the construction of a national Holocaust memory. The author highlights the struggles among the different actors involved in the creation of the museum to define the “boundaries of Holocaust memory” (p.3). Linenthal argues that the memory of the Holocaust aims to convey American values such as a better appreciation of democracy and a commitment to the values of “pluralism, tolerance and compromise” (p. 67).

In discussing the role of the USHMM, Levy and Sznaider (2006) argue that this museum reflects the transformation of the European-based Holocaust into a feature of
mainstream American culture. According to these authors, the museum creates a link between the history of Jewish suffering and contemporary American concerns. The statement of the former director, Michael Berenbaum, illustrates this position. He declared that the goal of the museum was “to tell the story of the museum in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in San Francisco, but a black leader from Atlanta, a Midwestern farmer, or a Northeastern industrialist” (Berenbaum cited in Levy & Sznaider, 2006, p. 153).

The Americanization of the Holocaust by the USHMM museum displaces this event from its historical and geographical context, a process of “de-territorialization” that enables the Holocaust memory to become part of American memory and history (Levy & Sznaider p.153). Young’s (1993) discussion of the USHMM underlines how the Holocaust resonates with American ideals since it reinforces America’s self-idealization as a haven for the world’s oppressed, as an enemy of racism and its ultimate expression, genocide, and as a universal warning against bigotry and antidemocratic forces that allow these catastrophes to occur (p. 336). Bartov (1997) discusses how the creation of a Holocaust museum, far from the sites of genocide, universalizes the Holocaust and marks it as a phenomenon of major significance for humankind.

Yad Vashem

The scholarly discussions about Israel’s Yad Vashem have been centered on how this museum embodies Israel’s ideals and political and ideological agendas. Relevant scholarly work has analyzed the political role of Yad Vashem in legitimizing the newly created state by linking it with the Shoah (Bartov, 1997; Friedlander, 1994; Stier, 2003; Young, 1993). According to Young (1993) and Friedlander (1994) the site where
Yad Vashem is located, next to the national military cemetery at Har Hazikkaron (Memorial Hill) facilitates the linking of martyrs of the Holocaust with those who fought for the foundation of the state of Israel. Young states that Yad Vashem’s creation runs parallel to the state’s birth and argues that, unlike other memorial centres in Israel, the establishment of this museum “bears the explicit imprimatur of the state” (p. 243) sharing and strengthening Israel’s “ideals and self-definition” (p. 243). Similarly, Friedlander (1994) argues, “Yad Vashem, the central place of commemoration of the Shoah, is the very basis of the legitimacy of the State of Israel” (p. 154). Accordingly, Bartov (1997) claims that the Jewish state has incorporated the memory of the Holocaust as part of its self-definition and legitimization, and that Yad Vashem embodies that official memory. The arguments of the authors cited above illustrate how Holocaust museums’ narratives can serve political agendas, which in the case of Yad Vashem, is intended to reinforce the necessity of the existence of the State of Israel.

In addition to the literature that analyzes the political context in the conception of Yad Vashem, significant scholarly work focuses on Yad Vashem’s function in shaping Holocaust memory. Young (1993) states that Yad Vashem acts as the official custodian and creator of Holocaust memory in Israel. Therefore, as the official memory of the Holocaust evolves, so too does the shaping of memory by the museum (p. 265). In The Texture of Memory (1993), Young traces the evolution of Yad Vashem from its beginning up until 2003, showing how this evolving project is steeped in ongoing memory work regarding the Holocaust.
**Holocaust Museums as Memorials**

The literature on Holocaust museums stresses how these museums are simultaneously museums and memorials. Clearly, Yad Vashem, since its inception, had the double mandate of a museum and memorial. Greenberg states that Holocaust centres are not only sites where memory is preserved but “where the story is told, where the acts of mourning and continuity are publicly expressed” (as cited in Linenthal, 1995, p.15). Relevant scholarship has focused on the memorial function of Holocaust museums, stressing how these museums have become sites where survivors and their relatives can pray, light candles and engage in collective acts of remembrance (Linenthal, 1995, Patraka, 1996; Wollaston, 2005; Young 1993). Linenthal discusses how in addition to functioning as a museum and educational centre, the creators of USHMM understood this project as a “living memorial” intended to fulfill a debt of remembrance through planning a memorial space for victims of the Holocaust. The Hall of Remembrance has become a place for public ceremonies and shared remembrance (p. 104). In his discussion about Yad Vashem, Young (1993) argues that it functions as a national shrine since it fulfills the traditional Jewish mandate of perpetuating the memory of the dead whose graves are unknown, by naming them.

As Holocaust museums fulfill their function as memorials, there is a transposition of the museum space into a sacred space. Scholars such as Stier (2003) and Linenthal (1995) point out the aura of sacredness surrounding Holocaust museums. Linenthal observes how the USHMM was conceived as a sacred environment by some of its commissioners and stresses how the creators found it inconceivable that a building devoted to Holocaust memory could not be seen as sacred in its totality (p. 82). Yad Vashem’s function as a sacred space has also been widely discussed in the literature.
Stier (2003) argues that Yad Vashem’s amalgamation of memorials and points of reflection surrounds visitors with “a multilayered sacred space” (p. 121) that makes visitors feel engulfed by “sacred memory” (p. 121). Moreover, the author notes that the Hall of Names, the archive in which the records of approximately two millions victims are registered, serves as “symbolic tombstones” (p. 122) that further reflect the museum’s sacred role (Stier, 2003).

Relevant scholarship is geared to analyze the function of Holocaust museums in providing a site for collective mourning (Hass, 1995; Huyssen, 1994). Hass (1995) explains how in the absence of tombstones, Holocaust museums can function as bereavement sites which “provide comfort derived from a sense of closeness to the victims” (p. 50). Lentin (2004) posits that included among the functions that Holocaust museums perform is provision of a space for collective Jewish mourning (p.115). This enables Holocaust museums to serve as gathering places where public ceremonies and shared remembrance can take place, allowing private mourning to become public.

**Holocaust Museums as Sites for Education**

Education plays a pivotal role in Holocaust museums. This goal is made explicit by the director of Yad Vashem who points out that education is the museum’s “highest priority” (Shalev & Gutterman, 2005, p.9). Holocaust museums’ educational mandate addresses the wider society. As sites for education, Holocaust museums play a crucial role in creating “an accessible Holocaust past for the public at large” (Stier, 2003, p.112). In contrast to the memorial function of Holocaust museums, which mainly addresses an audience for whom the Holocaust resonates at a personal level, the educational goal aims to reach a much broader audience.
Research on Holocaust museums as educational sites is focused on the form in which the Holocaust is presented to the viewers: the historical narrative as well as the material evidence displayed (Ellsworth, 2002; Lassing & Pohl, 2007; Linenthal, 1995; Ochsner, 1995; Stier, 2003; Tyndall, 2004; Young, 1993). As authoritative agents for education, Holocaust museums are central for situating the Holocaust in the public culture. Ochsner (1995) stresses the essentially didactic nature of the Holocaust museum experience which is based on providing viewers with information about this event. He states, “the narrative is primary, the objects including historical photographs, films, as well as artifacts, are in fact seen as evidence offered to sustain and validate the narrative” (p. 240). According to this author, the objects serve as evidence of the veracity of the narrative because they offer “immediate physical evidence” (p. 241) to the visitors that the events did occur (Ochsner, 1994).

However, since the 1990’s, the goal in Holocaust museums has shifted from the telling of the Shoah on a large scale through documents and artifacts, to the telling of individual stories. The chairman of the Yad Vashem Museum reflects this new posture when he states that, “The context is the big story of the Shoah, but the text must be the personal stories of the victims, the fate of this person, in this place and their testimony” (Erlanger, 2005, para. 5) Lassig and Pohl (2007) point out that this change of perspective in how the Holocaust is presented in museums is intended to “make abstract events comprehensible, to foster identification, and to overcome temporal, generational and geographical distance” (p. 157). The next section will discuss the personalization of the Holocaust as an educational approach in Holocaust museums.
Personalizing the Holocaust

According to Tyndall (2004), Yad Vashem has become the “worldwide arbiter” (p. 117) on how the Holocaust is presented and taught, taking the lead in the change of perspective on how the Holocaust is presented to viewers. Its aim is to tell the story of the Shoah “from the point of view of the Jews” (Yad Vashem visitors’ guide, 2005), i.e., to present the history of the Holocaust stationing “the Jewish point of view in the center” (Shalev & Gutterman, 2005, p. 22). Along with an emphasis on a Jewish perspective in the museum narrative, the curators have personalized the story. While the old Yad Vashem museum featured anonymous pictures of victims, the new museum, which opened in 2005, personalizes its narrative: faces are given names, and survivors offer testimonies. According to Lassig and Pohl (2007), as the personal ties to the Nazi era become weaker, it is necessary to give the Holocaust a concrete expression, and museums are responding to these demands with the “individualization paradigm” (p. 158). This paradigm, initiated in the 1990’s, is based upon presenting the names, faces and video-testimonies of victims and survivors (Lassig & Pohl, 2007). Wollaston (2005) observes how the tendency in the past to present one number: six million as a homogeneous group, ignoring factors such as class, gender, age, has given way to presenting the victims as individuals rather than as an overall statistic (p. 70).

Use of Photographs in Holocaust Museums

In recent years, significant work has been done on the topic of photography and Holocaust memory (Crownshaw, 2007; Hirsch, 1997, 1999, 2001; Liss, 1998). Pre-Holocaust photographs personalize the Holocaust and show people with an identity other than that of victim (Weiss, 2001). According to Struk (2004), Holocaust museums
have incorporated pre-war family photographs into their collections, since the public is no longer interested in exhibitions consisting entirely of atrocity photographs. Struk emphasizes how these photographs, which were previously thought to belong merely to the private sphere, without any documentary value, are now becoming "central elements" (p. 195) in Holocaust museums.

Hirsch (1997), drawing upon what theorists of photography have suggested about the simultaneous presence of life and death in photographs, argues that “The Holocaust photograph is uniquely able to bring out this particular capacity of photographs to hover between life and death” (p. 20) In looking at pre-Holocaust photographs, we know how soon these people, carrying on a normal life in an oblivious way, will die. Hirsch posits that the horror and enormity of Holocaust destruction emanates from the ordinary domestic family pictures.

It is precisely the utter conventionality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible for us to comprehend how the person in the picture was, or could have been annihilated….the horror of looking is not necessarily in the image, but in the story the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted (Hirsch, 1997, p. 20).

Similarly, Bartov (1997) argues that displaying photographs of the victims before their tragedy, allows us to think about them in their normal lives as they lived before they were turned into victims. Seeing them in their lives prior to the disaster does not allow us to think of them as mountains of corpses unrelated to our own existence, but makes us reflect that the “distance between normality and barbarity is a very short one indeed..” (p. 75).
Pre-Holocaust photographs enable victims’ individuality to be restored from the morass of death, and, like video testimonies, they constitute powerful means for transforming what Langer (1991) describes as the “dreadful anonymity” of the victims into “dreadful familiarity” (p. xiv). A major collection of pre-Holocaust photographs is displayed in both Yad Vashem and the USHMM. Although they differ significantly in how they were conceived, both aim to personalize the Holocaust as they bring the private into the public. A brief description of each follows in the next section.

**USHMM Tower of Faces:** One of the major exhibitions at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is the Tower of Faces. This is an exhibition of 1500 family photographs taken between 1890 and 1941 in the town of Ejszyszki by a Jewish couple of local photographers which were later collected by the granddaughter, Yaffa Eliach, and donated to the museum. Eliach stated that she wanted to create a photographic exhibition depicting every inhabitant of the town in order to bring “them all back to life, and all together in one place” (as cited in Struk 2004, p. 195). Linenthal (1995) explained that this exhibition sought to personalize the Holocaust (p.176). According to Hirsch (1997), the photographs displayed in the Tower of Faces provide a narrative and record about the Jewish world destroyed during the Holocaust, recreate what has been destroyed, provide a space of identification for the viewers since they can relate to the conventions of familial representation, and “elicit and facilitate the viewer’s mourning of the destruction” (p. 251).

**Yad Vashem’s Hall of Names:** Over the years, Yad Vashem has had as one of its main endeavors to collect the names of all Holocaust victims. In 1955, the museum began the project of collecting names of Holocaust victims by way of creating the Pages
of Testimony. These Pages consist of forms containing biographical information about the lives and deaths of victims in order “to redeem from oblivion the names and lives destroyed…Gathering names brings the responsibility of preserving the memory of each victim…Moreover, these special acid-free Pages also serve as symbolic tombstones for the victims” (Shalev & Gutterman, 2005, p. 277). The Pages of Testimony, submitted by relatives or people from all over the world who are related to the victims, were archived in shelves in the Hall of Names. This was a small building in a separate wing of the “old museum”. This is the term used by the staff to refer to the first set of buildings for Yad Vashem built in stages since 1957. Visitors to this hall would see only binders containing the pages of testimony which, according to a curator of Yad Vashem, was “not visually attractive” (A. Alexander, personal communication, December 17, 2006). In 2005, the “new museum” opened. This architecturally remarkable project, a spectacular prism-shaped building, provided an impressive structure for the Hall of Names, which houses the Pages of Testimony. In discussing the design of the new museum with its architect, the curators stressed the importance of creating a Hall of Names that would “put a face to Holocaust victims” (A. Alexander, personal communication, December 17, 2006). This structure, designed accordingly, consists of a circular hall with an upper cone that reaches ten meters skywards, on which photographs of Holocaust victims are displayed. These photographs are enlarged copies of the original photographs which were submitted to the museum attached to the Pages of Testimonies.

The exhibition in the upper cone has a background of vastly enlarged Pages of Testimony, which appear almost like wallpaper. Superimposed on each enlarged Page of Testimony is a smaller image of a Page of Testimony along with seven large
photographs. Of the seven photographs, usually only one has any actual correspondence to the Page of Testimony with which they are displayed. These images are all reflected in the water at the base of the lower cones.

The main curator of the Hall of Names, Abraham Alexander, explains that Yad Vashem has two million pages of testimony and around 120,000 photos. Three years ago, during the planning of the exhibition, only 15,000 pictures were scanned. The museum asked an art school to delegate students to select 1500 photographs out of the 15,000. The criteria for selecting these photographs were purely aesthetic. The students were told to choose those pictures that were emotionally moving, that would convey something to the viewers, and that were appealing to them as artists. From these pictures, the curators worked on the issue of representation; they composed a table of victims per country and included a number of pictures in relation to the number of victims. Another criterion was to include an equal number of men and women. The photographs displayed consist of 50% adults, 25% children, and 25% elders. The other aim was to include pictures that would reflect a diversity of community members such as religious people, soldiers, professionals, artists, etc. The museum curators gave the designers of the exhibition a few pictures in each category who then selected which photographs to display, according to the criterion of visual appeal. Ultimately, the designers chose 580 photographs for the exhibition (A. Alexander, personal communication, December 17, 2006).

In describing the nature of the display, Alexander stipulated that the photographs displayed were fixed and could not be changed. The relatives of the victims’ photos were not contacted, neither to ask permission or to notify them that their relatives’
photographs were displayed. The rationale was that it was too difficult to trace the data of the relatives since some photographs dated from more than 50 years earlier when the project of Pages of Testimony commenced. In two cases, visitors to the Hall of Names found the photographs of their relatives displayed; they were moved and surprised, but did not complain (A. Alexander, personal communication, December 17, 2006).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed above illustrates how different events and political circumstances have established the political and moral climate to enable those Holocaust memories, previously confined to the private realm of survivors, to emerge in the public arena. Furthermore, it explains how Holocaust remembrance has penetrated people’s consciousness and has become part of the cultural mainstream. As the Holocaust permeated the public arena in different countries, it led to the creation of public commemoration spaces, which differed from one country to another according to their particular needs and interests. The creation of national Holocaust museums in countries like the United States and Israel provided a highly authoritative space for conveying to the broad population knowledge about the Holocaust and for institutionalizing commemoration of this event. In addition to serving as sites for institutionalizing Holocaust memory and education, Holocaust museums have become memorial sites where Holocaust survivors engage in remembrance and mourning practices and rituals.

Integral to the national Holocaust museum’s narrative is the aim of presenting the Holocaust “with a concrete face” (Lassig & Pohl, 2007). The use of pre-Holocaust photographs in museum collections attempts to personalize this event. The focus has
shifted towards the individual and to remembering victims by portraying their faces (Shalev & Gutterman, 2005, p.278). As national museums such as USHMM and Yad Vashem have incorporated family pre-war photographs into their collections, the boundaries between the private and the public sphere have dissolved. Besides being intensely personal, family photographs are universal, since everyone can relate to them, regardless of whom they represent (Struk, 2004 p.194). In addition to restoring a human face to anonymous victims, photographs constitute potentially powerful means for responding to the ethical demand to bear witness. An ongoing concern, however, is that, as top-down projects, the relatives of those who are portrayed and displayed have not been directly involved in projects where their private losses have become part of the public sphere. In discussing the reappearance of photographs of victims in public squares and museums as a form of memorialization, Williams (2007) raises the ethical issues as to whether objects that originate in and belong to the private realm ought to be displayed in the public arena. He asks if the subjects who appear in the photographs would have wanted to become “public property” (p.73). However, he qualifies that these ethical considerations are ameliorated when the families of the victims take part in the curatorial process of the memorial exhibitions (p. 73). Such considerations generate further questions about importing the private into the public in Holocaust exhibitions. These questions so far have remained understudied: What is the potential for local Holocaust museums to engage in such initiatives? Since in these sites local survivors are actively involved with the activities of these centres, are local community centres a better location to mount such projects? What is the impact of these exhibitions on Holocaust survivors and their children?
Central to this study is the question of the meanings for survivors and their relatives of bringing into the public sphere objects that have traditionally belonged to the private realm.
CHAPTER 3: HOLOCAUST TRAUMA: ITS IMPACT ON HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND SECOND GENERATION

Trauma has become a major focus of discussion in our contemporary cultural landscape. Initially confined to the medical field, the discourse of trauma has permeated other fields such as history, sociology, literature, and has become pervasive in our contemporary society. The emergence of a social framework that enables the discussion of trauma has enabled trauma victims to bring into the public arena their traumatic memories. In discussing trauma in Holocaust survivors, the literature examines the therapeutic value of projecting the personal into the public sphere. This chapter constitutes a review of the literature on trauma from a sociological and psychological perspective. In the first section, I summarize the historical trajectory of the trope of trauma and its inception in our contemporary cultural landscape. I proceed with a summary of the literature that deals with Holocaust trauma and its impact on survivors and their offspring followed by a discussion of testimonies as practices outside the medical field that have a therapeutic value for helping Holocaust survivors and their children deal with Holocaust trauma. I end the chapter with a discussion of Jewish mourning rituals as another form of therapeutic practice.

Trauma: Historical Overview

In recent years, a number of scholars have devoted their attention to the renewed interest in the psychiatry and psychology of trauma. Scrignar (1988) gives an historical overview of the use of the term trauma. He explains that since the nineteenth century, scientists have been interested in the relationship between war and trauma and he cites
Freud’s research on soldiers’ reactions to the war experience and his theory of shell shock. Scrignar argues that after World War II, psychiatrists, psychologists and internists constructed different explanations about the impact of war on soldiers, but a confluence of these diverse perspectives developed in response to the Vietnam conflict. In the 80’s, responding to the large number of Vietnam veterans with stress symptoms, clinicians worked on new theoretical perspectives about trauma and developed the category called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This new diagnosis acknowledged trauma as an adverse psychological reaction to those events outside the range of usual human experience (Scrignar, 1988, p.9).

In *The Harmony of Illusions*, Young (1995) examines the emergence of the vocabulary of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PSTD) in the psychiatric nosology. He argues that the disorder is not timeless but is an historical product. The author notes that the notion of traumatic memory, born in the clinical narratives of Freud and Janet, attracted little attention in the psychiatric field let alone in the broader social sphere. Young argues that the re-entry of the concept of traumatic memory to the psychiatric discourse is mainly the product of an historical circumstance: the experiences of Vietnam War veterans and the Veterans Administration which provided the resources for PSTD research and specialized treatment (p.290). Elaborating on this same topic, Van der Kolk, Weisaeth and Der Hart (1996) argue that it was not until the inclusion of PSTD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM III) that PSTD became a diagnostic category. With the emergence of PSTD as a diagnostic category, various different syndromes such as “the rape trauma syndrome”, the
“battered woman syndrome”, and the “Vietnam veteran syndrome” were subsumed under this new category (p. 61).

However, it has to be asked, how did the term “traumatic memory”, for decades confined to the realm of psychiatry, permeate into the broader cultural, political and social landscape? What has made the concept of trauma flourish in our social milieu and become a key concept in our cultural and intellectual landscape? Scholarly work has responded to this question. Douglass and Vogler (2003), in discussing trauma discourse, attribute its prevalence to the array of cultural productions such as institutional practices, conferences and symposia dedicated to the explication of trauma, to theorists and critics who write about it, and to the museums and academic curricula that invoke the term (p.1).

Farrell (1998) is among the pioneers who tried to explain how the discourse of trauma permeated the cultural landscape. He argues that this clinical concept has become metaphorical for explaining many behaviours outside conventional medical practice. He states,

It would be hard to overestimate the plasticity and the elemental power of the concept...It has an explanatory power because, however overstated or implausible the concept sounds, people feel or are prepared to feel, whether they are aware of it nor not, as if they have been traumatized. (Farrell, 1998, p. x)

He adds, “in contemporary culture, trauma is both a clinical syndrome and a trope....a strategic fiction that a complex stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control” (p. 2). He explains that when trauma is used as a
trope, it “helps account for a world in which power and authority may seem overwhelmingly unjust…” (p. 24).

In this vein, Caruth (1995) explains that since the American Psychological Association (APA) officially acknowledged PSTD as a category of diagnosis, it now seems to be an all inclusive category that has moved beyond medically oriented psychiatry and psychoanalysis into the fields of sociology, history and literature. According to her, the phenomenon of trauma has become an all-inclusive category because “it brings us to the limits of our understanding”. She adds, “if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience” (p. 44).

In discussing trauma, LaCapra (2001) points out how it has been prominent in recent thought. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he explores and analyzes the role of trauma in and across history. He argues that trauma has been a preoccupation in contemporary culture, and “at times, it has even become an obsession” (LaCapra, 2001, p. x). The author states his concern with the “overall conflation of history or culture with trauma” (p. xi) and points out that in modern culture there is a tendency to convert trauma into an “occasion for sublimity… an entry into the extraordinary” (p. 23). LaCapra warns against the trend to convert trauma into redemptive narratives for individuals or groups. He contends that these redemptive narratives deny or repress the trauma that called them into existence replacing it with a narrative that is spiritually uplifting or identity-forming. In the same vein, Douglass and Vogler (2003) argue that trauma can
function as a “social glue” (p. 13) holding groups together on the basis of their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, disease or handicap (Douglass & Vogler, 2003).

As the discourse of trauma has permeated the social and cultural landscape, the Holocaust has been salient in cultural trauma discussions. Alexander (2004) explains the socio-cultural processes that make possible the emergence of trauma at a collective level. He argues that cultural trauma is not the product of an event but of the symbolic representations and claims about that specific event made by, what Weber defined as “carrier groups” (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). This term refers to those individuals, groups or institutions situated in particular places of the social structure that have the power to articulate the trauma to the public. Alexander argues that collective trauma is the creation of a new master narrative, a collective representation that defines the painful injury to the group and collectivity. Alexander explains that collective trauma is not an unmediated experience but rather “there is an interpretative grid through which all the ‘facts’ of trauma are mediated emotionally, cognitively, and morally (p. 200).

Huyssen (2003) summarizes how trauma discourse has become a cultural and intellectual phenomenon in our era. He states, “the 1990’s seemed to be haunted by trauma as the dark side of neoliberal triumphalism” (Huyssen, 2003, p. 9). He asks, What is at stake when we consider, as we seem to do ever more frequently, the whole history of the twentieth century under the sign of trauma, with the Holocaust increasingly functioning as the ultimate cipher of traumatic unspeakability or unrepresentability? (Huyssen, 2003, p. 9)
The force of the Holocaust as template and yardstick to discuss and measure trauma has been pivotal in the scholarship that deals with the topic of trauma (Huyssen, 2003; Kal, 1996; Klein, 2000; Torpey, 2003).

**Holocaust Trauma: Impact on Survivors**

As the discourse of trauma gained credence and the Holocaust entered public consciousness, theorists and scholars have engaged in profound reflection in the process of reckoning with the aftermath of this traumatic event. A growing body of interdisciplinary work has been devoted to understanding the aftereffects of the Holocaust in survivors and their offspring, as well as the way the trauma of the Holocaust is reflected in the cultural and social world. The literature on the impact of the Holocaust on survivors and their children has become extensive over the past twenty years. In general, the studies conducted by mental health professionals have been directed towards understanding the impact of massive psychic trauma on this population. The analysis of the literature that follows is focused on contributions in the area of mourning.

Danieli’s work set the framework for many other mental health practitioners. In her work with Holocaust survivors in the late 1960’s, she was astonished to find that the characteristic societal reaction, including those in the mental health area, was one of indifference and avoidance to the Holocaust survivors’ war accounts. Danieli (1998) argues that this reaction of society at large had a negative impact on the survivors’ post-trauma adaptation; therefore, survivors opted to become silent about their Holocaust experiences resulting in what she defined as a “conspiracy of silence.”(p. 4). Danieli explains, “this sense of isolation, loneliness and mistrust of society… impeded the
possibility of their intra-psychic integration and healing, and made their talk of mourning their massive losses impossible” (Danieli, 1998, p. 4).

Bar-On’s work is seminal in dealing with Holocaust trauma in survivors and their offspring (Bar-On, 1995, Bar On et al., 1998; Bar On & Chaitin, 2001). This psychiatrist stresses the difficulties Holocaust survivors have had in the resolution of the process of mourning. He argues that two circumstances contributed to these difficulties in mourning: an internal emotional state based on a discrepancy between the time of death itself and the time of being informed about it. This gap caused a delay in the onset of the normal process of mourning. The external circumstance refers to the social context that surrounded the Holocaust survivors. They were part of a post-war society that was not receptive to their stories and did not, therefore, facilitate the process of mourning. Many survivors became part of this conspiracy of silence and felt that they needed to suppress their feelings in order to adjust to their new social environs (Bar On et al., 1998, p. 321).

According to Terry (1984), there were many obstacles that interfered with the survivors’ mourning process, among them the lack of confirmation of their relatives’ death. Death was presumed, but in many cases not definitively confirmed. In addition to this fact, there were no identifiable burial places and no dates of death. According to this psychoanalyst, “the inability to mourn them [the losses] during and following the Holocaust has the highest pathogenic potential” (p. 147). Fogelman (1988), in discussing mourning in survivors, notes that the pervasive silence after the war impeded the completion of the mourning process in survivors and argues that the lack of a mourning process can exact a severe toll when it is ignored. She encourages therapists
to help Holocaust survivors go through the mourning process, which she divides in stages. A first stage is that of denial, which happens if the survivors did not witness the death of loved ones. Fogelman notes that the “phenomenon of the ‘missing grave’ impedes the mourning process” (p. 82). This author highlights the difficulties for survivors’ mourning process on not having “an individual monument where they can place flowers” (p. 82). The second stage of the mourning process is formulation or “grief reaction” (p. 83) and is characterized by the gradual recognition of the new reality: the permanent loss. The third stage is the search for meaning. For Fogelman, this is a search to attain connection and communal solidarity. In this stage, survivors want to become “collectors of justice” (p. 85) which is attained by bearing witness: lecturing, writing memoirs, and educating younger generations about the Holocaust.

According to Fogelman, memorialization projects are crucial in this search for meaning since the survivors feel that they have the responsibility to transmit the legacy left by those who perished, and this legacy is no less than the transmission of history. Fogelman argues, “this is a self help technique, a therapeutic alternative” (p. 85). A key point in this author’s work is the use of communal efforts as a therapeutic alternative to help Holocaust survivors go through their mourning process. Fogelman argues that “communal trauma of the Holocaust could not be resolved by mental health professionals in the traditional patient-therapist paradigm” (p. 101); thus, she advocates creating alternative therapeutic modalities that are supported and organized communally. She stresses that “a communal response is necessary to respond adaptively to a collective trauma” (Fogelman, 1988, p. 103).
In The Aftermath: Living with the Holocaust, Hass (1995) devotes a chapter to analyzing the mourning process of Holocaust survivors. He argues that this process is inhibited for many Holocaust survivors because they experienced many personal losses occurring at the same time. As a result, they have to mourn the totality; the personal gets obscured or buried beneath the entire catastrophe, and this hinders the mourning process. Moreover, the pressure to adapt to new circumstances and start a new life made survivors afraid to dwell on the past and unwilling to unleash intense emotions they thought best to contain (p. 44). In tune with other psychiatrists, Hass argues that, because of the forced separations, many survivors did not witness the death of their relatives; therefore, the deaths became more abstract. He quotes one survivor’s statement, “There is nothing left! No tombs, no ashes…” (p. 50). This author argues that in the absence of gravesites, monuments and museums dedicated to Holocaust remembrance act as mourning sites and “provide comfort [to the survivors] derived from a sense of closeness to the victims” (p. 50).

Kellermann’s extensive work with Holocaust survivors in Israel through Amcha (a Yiddish word derived from the Hebrew meaning ‘your people’), an Israeli centre devoted to providing treatment to this population, is extremely useful in understanding the long term psychological effects of Holocaust trauma. Based on interviews and treatment of many Holocaust survivor clients, he noted how the multiple early losses they had to endure still haunted them in their later lives. Kellermann (2001) concluded that this was the result of an abrupt and painful separation without any proper mourning (p. 208). The author points out the difficulties involved in offering counseling or psychotherapy services to Holocaust survivors; many survivors do not want to be treated as psychiatric
patients and they only seek mental health professionals when their need for symptom alleviation becomes pressing. In helping them deal with their trauma, Kellermann advocates memorialization over amnesia and argues that engaging survivors in commemorative practices and activities such as passing the legacy of the Holocaust to the next generation have proved useful in helping Holocaust survivors achieve some degree of resolution of their traumatic past (p. 206).

Impact of the Holocaust on the Second Generation

Considerable analytic work, in the past twenty years, has been devoted to trying to understand the impact of the Holocaust on the second generation. This research has been mainly focused on how children of Holocaust survivors grapple with their parents’ unresolved issues regarding their wartime experience. This work has been generated not only by mental health practitioners, but by the children themselves. The second generation’s reflections on the main themes and preoccupations they carry within themselves, as children of Holocaust survivors, has produced a vast array of work in a variety of fields such as art and literature.

As a child of Holocaust survivors, Prince embarked on research intended to find common themes among the second generation that departed from the earlier emphasis on the psychopathological consequences of being children of survivors. In his book, *The Legacy of the Holocaust* (1985), he reports the results of his research. In this study, which consisted of in-depth interviews with children of survivors, he noted that an important theme in the second generation’s accounts was that despite the knowledge of their parents being Holocaust survivors, the parents’ experiences remained a mystery, as their parents’ stories had a “vague, elusive” (p. 30) quality. This was mainly because
of the parents’ communication style when talking about their past. Parents were ambivalent about disclosing their experiences, and when they did, the information disclosed was minimal and fragmentary. Prince noted that, despite their feeling of having a family history with most pieces missing, the children of survivors chose to live without unraveling the mysteries of their past. Some critical information about their parents’ lives, such as previous marriages or children, were only learned accidentally.

Danieli (1998), who also conducted research with the second generation, observed how the silence imposed by society induced Holocaust survivors to maintain this “conspiracy of silence,” consequently their children wallowed in a lingering mystery about their past, fraught with “myths and fantasies” (p. 5). However, despite the pervading silence, this author noted that there was a hovering psychological presence of the Holocaust in these homes. Danieli concludes that the children of survivors consciously or unconsciously absorbed elements of their parents’ Holocaust experiences and incorporated them into their lives. These families, then, proved to be vehicles for intergenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma.

Bar-On’s work is seminal in the understanding of the second generation’s experience with the Holocaust (Bar On, 1995; Bar On et al. 1998; Bar On & Chaitin, 2001). He points out how these children were raised in an atmosphere where the impact of the Holocaust was profound; nevertheless, these issues were seldom made explicit. For parents, the silence that prevailed around their Holocaust experience was a way to protect their children from the horrors of the Holocaust. The children, however, reacted to this silence, and felt “enveloped in awesome mystery” (Bar On, 1995, p. 20), although they were prevented from understanding the issues that derived from their parents’
Holocaust experience. For Bar-On, the “untold” story of the past has a greater intensity than the “told” story, and the children learned to respond to this silence with what the author calls a “double wall”: parents did not tell and children did not ask (Bar On, 1995, p. 20).

Hass’ research, based on personal interviews and a questionnaire with forty-eight second generation participants, is reported in *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Second Generation*. In this study, Hass examined the impact that the parents’ disclosure of their Holocaust experience had on their children (Hass, 1990). Hass (1990) noted that the children’s experiences varied greatly: some parents spoke openly about their past while other avoided the topic almost completely. However, even among those who spoke with their children about their war experience, their revelations were fragmentary and divulged slowly over many years (p. 83), and did not provide a sufficient context for the events told. This left the children with the feeling that there were secrets laced in those accounts. Hass writes that the offspring grew up in a family atmosphere of “secretiveness” (p. 73). These secrets were also maintained by the children, who, in order to avoid adding to the suffering of their parents, would refrain from asking them about their Holocaust experience. Hass noted that for some children, being a child of survivors became “a central part of their identity” (p. 80).

In *Memorial candles: Children of the Holocaust*, Wardi (1992) is principally concerned with the role children of survivors have in perpetuating the memory of this event and notes how these children served as a compensation and substitute for the relatives who perished. Wardi argues that a common dynamic in survivors’ families, is to ascribe to one of the children the role of “memorial candle” (p. 6) for all the relatives who
lost their lives during the Holocaust. According to Wardi, this particular child is given the task of preserving the memory of the past and linking it to the present and future. These children, the memorial candles of the family, have a central mission which is to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and of their deceased relatives (p. 46).

Fodorova (2005) provides a very insightful description of the impact of the Holocaust on the second generation,

The second generation is not only unsure about what they have lost but whom they have lost. Losing people whose names, likenesses and habits they know so little about fills many of them with guilt and shame, with a sense of inner emptiness. Despite not knowing the ones they have lost, they sense that, through losing them, they have lost a part of themselves. (Fodorova, 2005, p. 302).

This author stresses how for the second generation everything about the dead relatives remained blank. These relatives “disappeared without a trace” (p. 303), and the second generation children were left not knowing their names, age, life stories, and death circumstances. Moreover, parents referred to their dead relatives as “my” parents, “my” sisters, “my” brothers” depriving the children from the experience of referring to them as “your” grandparents, ”your” uncles, “your” aunts (p. 304). Fodorova points out that “rather than a loss, this absence of naming created a vacuum. The dead could only be internalized in the form of a painful, secret absence” (p. 304). Fodorova’s work follows the same line of Bar- On. She argues that children, sensing their parents’ emotional fragility, barely asked about their dead relatives; therefore, the dead relatives became a taboo in the families. The author concludes that this unspoken topic stymied the process of mourning for parents and children.
Key contributions to the literature on the second generation have come from fields outside the mental health area such as journalism and literary studies. In *Children of the Holocaust*, Epstein (1979) engaged in autobiographical writing combined with a journalistic inquiry based on interviews with second generation adults. One of her goals was to challenge the “overwhelmingly negative” (p. 202) portrait of the Holocaust survivors and their children that psychiatrists and psychologists had constructed. Through her interviews, the author reveals how the Holocaust became a touchstone not only for the survivors, but also for their children (p. 260). Her book yields an account of how the second generation struggled to become visible and break out of the silence in which they had previously colluded.

Years later, Eva Hoffman (2004) in *After Such Knowledge*, explored “the psychological, moral and philosophical implications of the second-generation story” (Epstein, 2004, p. xiii). In this autobiographical account, Hoffman notes how the initially fragmented Holocaust narrations were moments, images and phrases that were mainly emotional. Hoffman argues that the Holocaust legacy passed to the second generation was not a “processed, mastered past, but the splintered signs of acute suffering, of grief and loss” (p. 34). Therefore, the children’s knowledge of the Holocaust is mainly subjective and emotional. Hoffman claims that the second generation’s fate “has been to live with a multitude of lost ‘objects’ that they never had a chance to know” (p. 66). She explains that the crux of the second generation is that it has inherited, not experience, but its shadows. She adds that, “Transferred loss more than transferred memory, is what children of survivors inherit; and how do you get over loss that has no concrete shape or face?” (p. 73). Hoffman argues, therefore, that the second generation
has to deal with specters which are harder to grasp than palpable realities. She concludes that in order to overcome this legacy of shadows, the second generation has to,

walk up imaginatively to such scenarios (however real or fantasized they may be) in order to dissolve their power. They [offspring] have to imagine what they have lost after all, to encounter dead ancestors whom they never met, and regret their loss for themselves. (Epstein, 2004, p. 74)

In sum, the aforementioned studies underscore the long-lasting effects that the Holocaust experiences had not only for the survivors but for their children as well. Particularly important is the incomplete mourning process for survivors. Psychotherapists agree that in order to assist this population, therapeutic alternatives have to go beyond the traditional therapy paradigms (Fogelman, 1988; Hass, 1995; Kellermann, 2001).

Analytic work by professionals in the mental health area suggests that engaging Holocaust survivors to give testimony, a practice outside the scope of the clinical practice, has proven beneficial to this population. The next section reviews the literature on testimonies. It starts by considering theoretical issues around testimonies and proceeds to a discussion of testimonies from a therapeutic perspective. The section ends with a discussion of the literature on Jewish mourning rituals and their potential to facilitate mourning processes.

**Holocaust Testimonies**

Douglass and Vogler (2003) argue that survivors’ testimonies have become the late twentieth century mode of representing traumatic events, since eye witness
accounts have been associated with the notion of authority and authenticity (p.11). Along the same line, Feldman (1992) notes that in the “post-traumatic century” that we live in, testimony is the “mode of excellence” of our times, and that our era can be defined as “the era of testimony” (p. 5).

Wieviorka’s, *The Era of the Witness* (2006), explains that it was during Eichmann’s trial when Holocaust survivors first emerged from the private to the public sphere through their testimonies. The author argues that before that event, Holocaust survivors did not have a social identity, since society did not acknowledge them as such. However, this trial affirmed the identity of survivors and consigned them the role of bearers of history (p.88). This historical circumstance marked the “advent of the figure of the witness” (p.95). As Holocaust testimonies entered the public sphere, the literature on Holocaust testimonials proliferated, much of it focusing on the challenges of bearing testimony, on the existing gap between what has been witnessed and what can be narrated in a testimony, or in what Bernard-Donals and Glejzer (2001) describe as the distance between “what was seen and what can be said” (p. 50).

Langer’s influential piece, *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991), is an important contribution to Holocaust testimony literature. His work is focused on understanding the challenges and limitations intrinsic to Holocaust testimonies; among them, the challenging task for survivors of trying to recall what happened “then” and “back there” (deep memory) from the vantage point of today (common memory). Langer stresses the difficulties of “narrating, from the context of normality now, the nature of abnormality then” (p. 22). The author warns us about the perils embedded in approaching the survivors’ stories from a redemptive perspective and seeing them as “triumphant
moments exhibiting the resilience of the human spirit, the resourceful will, the intrepid mind, the resolve to survive Nazi oppression” (p. 36). Langer emphasizes that these moments are inseparable from their antithesis; most stories, the author notes, are not “ethical insight but confusion, doubt, and moral uncertainty” (p. 37). Langer concludes that we have to accept this dissonance since these testimonies embrace the legacy of the simultaneous destruction and survival of Jews during the Nazi period. He notes that as an audience to these testimonies we have to suspend our judgment and revise our notions of the “good” to allow the integrity of the narrative to emerge.

In their analysis of Holocaust testimonies, Bernard-Donals and Glejzer (2001) argue that testimonies make present a series of breaks and stutters. According to these authors, “the act of witnessing itself becomes apparent only at [these] points of trauma” (p. 52). The authors argue that it is not the traumatic event that is visible in the testimony of the Holocaust survivors, but the structure of this trauma; the narratives make apparent the lack of a language capable of making the viewer or interviewer see that world. The testimony is a “testament to what cannot be seen-and understood conceptually-but what could only be ‘experienced’ as excessive and as impossible to narrate” (p. 57).

**Testimonies as Therapeutic Acts**

A significant body of literature that deals with testimonies has been written by mental health practitioners. Cienfuegos and Monelli’s (1983) seminal publication, “The Testimony of Political Repression as a Therapeutic Instrument,” laid the groundwork for the use of testimony as a therapeutic tool. In the 1970’s, Cienfuegos and Monelli, developed their “testimony method,” and engendered a new discourse in the treatment
of trauma. According to these mental health practitioners, testimony becomes a healing device and a form of catharsis that facilitates the elaboration of the traumatic experience since the process of truth revealing results in psychological healing (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983, p. 45). The idea that trauma is healed by bearing testimony to the injustices suffered was further elaborated in the work of the Danish psychiatrists, Agger and Jensen, in the late 1980’s. As a result of their work with political refugees, these therapists noted that the word “testimony” has a double connotation: a public one, objective, judicial or political; and a subjective one, referring to the private and cathartic (Agger & Jensen, 1990, p. 116). The authors claim that through bearing testimony, “the private pain is transformed into political or spiritual dignity” (p.116).

Herman’s (1992) groundbreaking book, *Trauma and Recovery*, focuses on the therapeutic function of bearing testimony and argues that testimony has a private dimension which is confessional, and a public aspect which is political. The author explains that testimony gives a new and larger dimension to the person’s private experience since many survivors of trauma seek a resolution of their traumatic experience through sharing their traumatic stories with the community. Testifying about their experiences engages the survivors in public action since this act is seen by survivors of trauma as an educational and political effort to prevent others from being victimized in the future. The author stresses that these efforts have in common the raising of public awareness. Herman notes that by engaging in a social action project, the survivors take upon themselves the mission of speaking about the “unspeakable” (p. 208).
Herman highlights the role of the community in the healing process and argues that sharing the traumatic memory with others, “is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world” (p.70). When victims speak their truth to a listening community, this author explains, that community bears witness to their suffering. The response of the community provides the public acknowledgment that helps trauma survivors in their healing process. Herman notes that the sharing of their story with a wider community also enables trauma survivors to restore their sense of connection with the community. Herman’s analysis highlights that it is the passing from the private to the public that enables survivors to work on their recovery process.

Felman and Laub’s book, Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992) is a major contribution to the literature on testimony and bearing witness. As a psychoanalyst, Laub provides an insightful perspective on the therapeutic function of giving testimony. In serving as an interviewer for the Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, he recognized that survivors felt compelled to tell their stories. He states, “the survivor did not only need to survive so they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive.” (p. 78). Laub argues that in bearing witness, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event; therefore, the listener participates in the creation of knowledge of the trauma. Laub states, “The listener can no longer ignore the questions of facing death, of facing time and its passage, of the meaning and purpose of living, of the limits of one’s omnipotence, of losing the ones that are close to us…” (p. 72). The listener of Holocaust experiences takes on the responsibility of bearing witness that previously the narrator felt they bore alone (p. 85). Laub emphasizes the role of the
listener as a “companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone” (p. 59).

In discussing testimonies, Felman (1992), Laub’s co-author, stresses the therapeutic aspect of this act. She states that by contributing with testimonial video tapes to an archival collection such as the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, many Holocaust survivors were able to narrate their stories for the first time.

For the first time, [they] believe that it is possible, indeed, against all odds and against their past experience, to tell the story and be heard, to in fact address the significance of their biography…to a hearing ‘you’ and to a listening community. (Felman, 1992, p. 41).

The author stresses the liberating function of testimonies and characterizes them as “profoundly freeing” (p. 47). Felman describes bearing witness as “to speak for others and to others” (p. 3), acknowledging the need for an audience in the recounting of the traumatic experience. She argues that to bear witness is more than simply reporting a fact or relating an experience; it is about appealing to a community, impressing upon a listener, committing to oneself and others, and taking responsibility, through speech, for “the truth of an occurrence” (p. 204).

Other mental health practitioners have conducted research on the therapeutic impact of disclosure of the Holocaust experiences (Finkelstein & Levy, 2006; Krell, 1985; Pennebaker, Barger, & Tiebout, 1989;). For example, Krell’s (1985) research points out its therapeutic value for survivors. He argues that by giving testimony, the survivors integrate fragmented experiences into a narrative that is left as a legacy to future generations (p. 400). Finkelstein and Levy (2006) argue that disclosing their
Holocaust experiences through the video testimony project proves therapeutic for survivors since it helps them construct meaning out of a horrific past and as a means of leaving a legacy for their families (p.137).

It should be noted that the discussion of the therapeutic function of testimonies has not been confined to the mental health field. Important contributions to this topic have emerged from other disciplines such as literature and philosophy. The importance that giving testimony can have for survivors is captured in Primo Levi’s statement, “For many of us, being interviewed was a unique and memorable occasion, an event we had been waiting for since the day of the liberation, and that event gave our liberation a meaning” (as cited in Wieviorka, 2006, p. 394).

In *The Longest Shadow* (1996), Hartman states that testimonies “allow survivors to speak for themselves” (p.133). He explains that testimonies are “at once, formal depositions, informal chronicles, expressive memoirs, and testimonies that look toward the establishment of a legacy” (p.136). Hartmann asserts that testimonies allow Holocaust survivors to break the silence and thus constitute an “affirmative step” (p.14). According to Douglass and Vogler (2003), through their testimonies, survivors have become performers; telling their stories is a form of self-therapy and an act to inspire others. The authors argue that the survivors’ narrative is a form of active remembering and telling capable of moving the narrator from the state of helpless victim to empowered survivor (p. 41).

Simon’s work can be tied in with this literature. His research focuses on the listener to testimonies. In “The Paradoxical Practice of *Zakhor*: Memories of ‘What has never been my fault or my deed’” (2000), he examines how the listener of traumatic
stories attends them. Simon notes that listening to these stories disrupts and destabilizes the present. He further contends that this disruption opens new ways of perceiving the present. Simon argues that the trauma stories matter because embedded in their remembrance is the possibility of hope. He explains, “the possibility of hope depends on our capacities for providing a psychological locus for such stories, a locus that requires we take up the stories of others within the pedagogical dynamics of zakhor” (p.17). According to Simon, bearing witness to those testimonies is more than attending to the facts but allowing ourselves to be “wounded by others’ wounds”, (p. 20). For Simon, attending to one’s responsiveness to what is being heard may lead to new forms of remembrance practices and bearing witness. In The Ethics of Memory, Margalit (2002) elaborates the figure of the witness. He defines the moral witness as “one who experienced the suffering – one who is not just an observer but also a sufferer” (p.150). He adds, “the moral witness has to live in order to serve [and hopes] that in another place or another time there exists or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony” (p.155).

**Jewish Mourning Rituals as Therapeutic Acts**

Scholars from diverse disciplines have focused their work on the relationship between Jewish mourning rituals and the grieving process, focusing on the therapeutic role that religious mourning practices have for the mourners. Wahlhaus (2005), a psychotherapist and rabbi, examined the Jewish mourning ritual to assess its psychological benefits. She argues that traditional Jewish rituals facilitate the grieving process by providing “a framework which both contains and controls the grieving
process. They challenge the defenses of denial, avoidance and isolation. They draw on community resources to facilitate the painful journey through each phase of grief work” (p.107). Wahlhaus stresses the importance of having a physical marker for the deceased, since graves represent a “symbol to relate to and something to visit” (p. 104). Along the same line, Brener (1993), a psychotherapist who combines her practice with traditional Jewish practices, describes the therapeutic benefit of the Jewish mourning ritual. She explains that Jewish mourning rituals provide mourners with a structure. This structure enables them to express their grief in a protective environment, a comfort zone, which helps them in their healing process.

Gerson (1977) provides an insightful approach regarding the role the community plays in helping mourners go through their mourning process. In discussing Jewish funeral rituals, the author argues that the involvement of the community during shivah (the Jewish mourning ritual) allows the mourners to confront and accept their loss. Gerson argues that the community is the “greatest asset of the Jewish approach to mourning” (p. 267). The community provides help and comfort to the mourner during the death rites, thus facilitating the mourners’ resolution of grief (p.267). Along the same line, Wolowelsky (2001) emphasizes the importance of community for mourners. He explains that as a result of having the community as a principal component in the Jewish mourning rituals, private mourning has a public dimension inherent in the communal experience. The author highlights the therapeutic function of this communal involvement and argues that mourning done completely apart from the community would lack the element of integrity given by the combination of the private and public dimensions that characterize Jewish ritualized mourning (p. 473).
Conclusion

As the discourse on trauma has found an important niche in our social and cultural landscape, so too has the imperative to acknowledge the suffering victims of trauma have gone through. The social framework of contemporary society has enabled survivors to step out of their secrecy and tell their stories. As Herman (1992) states, “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims” (p.1). Video testimonies projects such as those carried out by the Fortunoff Archives and the Shoah Foundation have enabled Holocaust survivors to transcend the confines of their private suffering and “speak for others to others” (Felman, 1992, p. 3).

Communal religious practices aimed to honour the memory of the deceased relatives have been adopted by Holocaust survivors throughout the world. Public monuments in Jewish cemeteries with the relatives’ names inscribed on them have allowed survivors to have a physical marker that symbolizes their losses and helps them in their mourning process. However, despite the therapeutic value of these practices, the literature also emphasizes the incomplete mourning process that is commonly found amongst Holocaust survivors (Bar-On, 1998; Danieli, 1998; Hass, 1995; Kellermann, 2001).

The study herein aims to explore the potential value of therapeutic alternatives outside the clinical setting that might help Holocaust survivors cope with their traumatic memories and incomplete mourning processes. Specifically, I will examine whether cultural spaces such as museums can serve as therapeutic venues enabling Holocaust survivors and their children to cope more effectively with their traumatic memories. *Faces of Loss* was one such project bringing private losses to the public space of the
Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. This exhibition combined a testimonial element that provided a visual testimony to the Holocaust survivors’ losses with a communal element, that engaged the survivors in a project of collective remembering and mourning. These two elements have frequently been highlighted in the literature for their therapeutic potential. This particular research fills a gap in the literature by connecting local Holocaust museums’ personalized exhibitions with therapeutic approaches for addressing the experiences of Holocaust survivors and second generation. It does so through answering the central research question: What were the meanings for the participants of *Faces of Loss* as they brought their private losses to the public arena?
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The tradition of inquiry informing this study is an ethnographic approach which has been widely employed in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Miller, Hengt, & Su-hua, 2003, p. 219). In contrast with anthropology, in sociology, there has been significantly more debate on the use of ethnographic methods since this strategy of inquiry has been seen by some positivistic sociologists as value laden and not replicable (Johnson, 1990, p. 10; Goldenberg, 1992). In discussing interpretive methods in sociological research, Goldenberg (1992) advocates for use of the ethnographic tradition in sociological research claiming that “sociological studies in this tradition must still be research studies” (p. 322). He explains that this tradition calls for locating the research topic in the context of relevant literature, utilizing the appropriate methodology, compiling a data base with the participants’ statements, and treating the data systematically in such a way that the analysis can be used in describing, understanding, predicting and explaining other phenomena of interest to sociologists (p. 324). This study is guided by these principles which make an ethnographic study relevant from a sociological perspective.

Following the ethnographic tradition, the aim of this type of inquiry is to “penetrate participants’ meaning system” by engaging in the community’s lives, practices and celebrations (Miller, Hengt, & Su-hua, 2003, p. 223). I employed this qualitative research paradigm since my purpose was to understand the participants’ subjective experience, their perspectives and meanings (Marshall & Rossman, as cited in Creswell, 1994, p.161).
My goal is to describe and interpret how members of a “culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61) – Holocaust survivors and their children – experienced and responded to the exhibition *Faces of Loss*. Through immersing myself in the day-to-day activities of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre as a participant-observer, and gathering information through in-depth interviews and materials, I explored and attempted to understand and describe the meanings that the exhibition had for the participants. I followed the ethnographic tradition since it starts from the assumption that I am not reporting a social world that is independent from its textual representations. This tradition also assumes that accounts are “partial, incomplete and inextricably bound to the contexts and rationales of the researcher” (Athiede & Johnson, 1998, p. 288). I was influenced by a feminist approach which assumes that the production of knowledge is situated and advocates for establishing a relationship with the participants that is based on “equality rather than domination” and “attachment rather than detachment or disinterest” (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 15). This perspective sees both parties (the ethnographer and the participants) as “vulnerable experiencing subjects working to co-produce knowledge” (Abu-Lughod, 1993, as cited in Tedlock, 2000, p. 467). I see my research, therefore, as the product of a “dialogue” between the participants and myself (Angrosino & Mays, 2000, p. 675).

Based on the emphasis in contemporary ethnographic research that accepts active participation as a legitimate base from which to conduct research (Angrosino & Mays, 2000; Miller, Hengst & Su-hua Wang, 2003; Tedlock, 2000), I entered into close and relatively prolonged interaction with those who developed and produced the exhibition, and I interacted with both the public and the survivor community during the
production and during the time the exhibition was publicly displayed. I became an 
“active-member researcher” (Angrosino & Mays, 2000, p. 677), which means that I 
became actively involved with the central activities that emerged in the process of 
creating, mounting and dismantling the exhibition by becoming a volunteer at the 
VHEC. As a volunteer, I assumed responsibilities with some of the central activities 
where my background in psychology proved helpful, such as the initial intake interviews 
and the planning of the opening night.

My active personal participation within the ethnographic scene – the Vancouver 
Holocaust Education Centre – required me to reflect upon authorial issues that might 
have emerged in generating my ethnographic information and accounts, which included 
my biases and emotions that may have filtered into my research (Altheide & Johnson, 
1998). Angrosino & Mays (2000) emphasize the importance of understanding where the 
researcher is situated in terms of gender, class and ethnicity and how these attributes 
can shape one’s interactions and interpretations (p. 675).

In conducting this research, as I approached and interacted with participants of 
Faces of Loss and staff, I brought with me my diverse academic backgrounds and 
personal identities. I entered the scene as a Mexican, Jewish, mature doctoral student. 
However, despite the various identities I brought with me to my research, one 
professional identity seemed to overshadow the others, and that was my past 
professional activity of counselor. I was aware that since I was dealing with a group of 
participants who had undergone Holocaust trauma, my training as a therapist guided 
many of my interactions and understandings of the phenomena I was investigating. On 
this, Angrosino and Mays (2001) explain that ethnographers do not passively react to a
position assigned by others in the fieldwork, but consciously adopt “situational identities” as a basis for their social interactions during their research (p. 678). I re-connected with my identity as a therapist, and this identity not only shaped my understandings, but likely shaped the interactions of others towards me, particularly the curator, who was aware of the sensitive nature of the intake interviews and appreciated having someone with my training and expertise doing them. My personal background as an immigrant Jewish academic influenced my interactions with participants, especially Holocaust survivors and child survivors, whose curiosity about me seemed more oriented towards these personal characteristics. Two frequent questions I would be asked were if I was Jewish and where my accent originated. Being Mexican was an ice-breaker with many participants who had either traveled there or had a story to tell about my homeland. In regards to my Jewish identity, it seemed to give most participants an initial reassurance that, despite differences in age, culture, language, and past experiences, we had a common identity that gave us a sense of connection. My Jewish identity not only affected my participants’ views about me, but it also influenced my own interactions with them and stirred my sense of belonging to the local community. Having been practically disconnected from the local Jewish community since I moved to Canada, this fieldwork made me feel that I was being incorporated into a social world that I had not considered myself part of before I engaged in this project. These recognitions of the influence of my personal and professional identities echo McLeod’s (2001) assertion that, “In qualitative research, the experience and the identity of the researcher always influence the ‘findings’ that are produced” (p. 195).
The Site of Research: The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC)

As has been described in the Holocaust remembrance section (chapter 2), by the mid-seventies, Holocaust remembrance had already been institutionalized and was inscribed on the Jewish community’s calendar. The National Holocaust Remembrance Committee, created by the Canadian Jewish Congress in the mid-seventies, played a pivotal role in furthering Holocaust education and communal remembrance (Bialystok, 2000). As a result of this, throughout Canada, Jewish communities and Holocaust survivors initiated formal Holocaust memorial programs. From this time on, Holocaust survivors engaged in conceiving and organizing a range of Holocaust remembrance activities which eventually culminated in the establishment of Holocaust educational centres and museums aimed to convey the knowledge of the Holocaust to the wider community (Krolik-Hennenberg, 2002).

In the mid 1970’s, Robert Krell, a local child survivor, in collaboration with academics and the Canadian Jewish Congress, founded the Standing Committee on Holocaust Education, an appendage to the Canadian Jewish Congress, which organized a Holocaust Symposium for high school students. This initiative consisted of an introductory lecture on the Holocaust, a keynote speaker, a film, and small-group seminars with Holocaust survivors sharing their stories (Krell, 2007). Years later, in 1983, Krell gathered a group of British Columbia survivors and their children to discuss with them his plans for building a Holocaust Education Centre in Vancouver (Krell, 2007). In order to implement that plan, Krell founded the Vancouver Centre Society for Education and Remembrance. In 1985, this group of survivors initiated two projects: the building of a Holocaust Memorial at the Schara Tzedeck Cemetery and the creation of a
centre to house the existing programs and establish an exhibition space. The memorial was built before the centre since the survivors wanted to have the memorial first (Krell, 2007). Once completed, it had inscribed in it 1100 names of Holocaust victims, all related to the local Jewish community. The engraving of names is an ongoing project. After this project was accomplished, efforts were then directed towards the establishment of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC), which opened in 1994, is a teaching museum and educational resource centre devoted to teaching Holocaust-based anti-racism education. This site consists of a 4,400 square foot museum located in the lower level of the Jewish Community Centre on West 41st Avenue, in Vancouver. The VHEC houses an archival collection that contains over 1300 primary documents and photographs. It has over 218 recorded testimonies from Holocaust survivors, rescuers and eyewitnesses from the local community (“vhec.com”, 2007). It also develops outreach kits, curriculum materials, and teaching aides to educate the public, especially students and teachers, about the events and implications of the Holocaust. Its major public education programs are the Survivor Outreach Project, established in 1986, and the Annual Symposium on the Holocaust at UBC, in effect since 1975. These programs, which have Holocaust survivors share their Holocaust experiences with students, have been very successful. In 2005, the Annual High School Symposium attracted 1,700 students and between September 2004 to May 2005, the Outreach Survivor Speakers program addressed over 11,000 students in 68 schools (VHEC Annual Report, 2004-2005). As well, the VHEC also has an online teaching website which contains online exhibitions.
The VHEC also organizes commemorative events which include Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, Kristallnacht, which is primarily an academic lecture with some commemorative aspects, and cemetery services at the Holocaust memorial.

Regarding the services the VHEC provides to the local community, the Centre offers services for survivors, that include the counselling services of a social worker, social events such as a monthly drop-in for Holocaust survivors, child survivors and second generation, and assistance with restitution and claims. The VHEC’s primary funding comes from the Endowment Fund established mainly by survivor donors, but other members of the Jewish community have donated to the endowment fund as well. Other funding sources come from another endowment fund created by members of the second generation, grants from the federal, provincial and civic governments, and donations by individuals and corporations.

According to the information provided by the VHEC, as of 2007, there were two hundred and sixty nine Holocaust survivors and child survivors in metro Vancouver. All of them are granted membership at the VHEC. The membership fee is voluntary for them. The membership number of second generation is eighty one (R. Fox, personal communication, September, 2008). In 2007, the number of survivors and child survivors who were currently active in outreach education programs (in high schools and at the annual UBC symposium) was twenty (R. Fox, personal communication, September 2008). By 2009, this number dropped down to eighteen, three of them Holocaust survivors and the rest, child survivors (R. Fox, personal communication, August 2009).

**Faces of Loss: Remembering Those Who Perished**

*Faces of Loss: Remembering Those Who Perished* was an exhibition curated by
Roberta Kremer, then the executive director of the VHEC. This exhibition was composed of photographic images of people who perished in the Holocaust and were related to families living in the Greater Vancouver area. The faces of these victims were scanned, once they were extracted from the family group photos or from images of the person, and were enhanced through a Photoshop computer program. After this was done, the images were printed and mounted on foam core. The majority of images came from original pre-Holocaust pictures of the victims of the Holocaust whose families later immigrated to Canada and now live in Vancouver. However, there were images from victims whose families had immigrated to Canada long before the Holocaust, and still had family in Europe who fell prey to the Nazis.

**Description of the Exhibition**

The exhibition was held at the VHEC for seven months, from January to August 2005. It was set up in stages. The exhibition began in January with around 50 images covering two walls of the museum space, and by May there were over 400 photographs (VHEC Annual Report, 2004-2005). During the first three months, the incoming images were installed on the three outside walls of the square display space. However, by April, the exhibition took over the whole exhibition space of the VHEC, which included the three outside walls of the display space plus two removable partitions which were placed in the centre of the three outside walls, parallel to each other. These two removable partitions had add-ons, perpendicular to them, that were used as additional installation spaces. In setting up the removable dividers, the idea was to place them in such a way that the exhibition looked more like a maze than a linear arrangement. The rationale for this was that the exhibition did not have a beginning or an end; it was not
laid in a sequence with a starting point for viewing or a directional layout. The viewers would go on a self-guided tour, making their own choices as where to begin their tour of the exhibition and where to end it (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 25, 2005).

The front add-on of one of the removable partitions constituted the title panel of the exhibition and was facing the entrance to the Centre. To the left of the introductory panel, there was a table with a memorial candle that was lit every day. Initially, the far left wall of the museum had a map of Europe with the location of the concentration and death camps. This map was used during the school group tours to help students locate the sites of the concentration camps. However, as the exhibition increased in size, the map was moved to the education room and this space was used to install more images. There were only a few artifacts in the exhibition, displayed in three glass cases and placed on the flank and at the end side of one of the removable walls. The one on the side of the wall contained a memorial book, and of the two others, one contained a child’s shoe from Auschwitz, and the other a brick from a crematorium, a piece of barbed wire and an electrical insulator from an electrified fence of a concentration camp.

Upon entrance to the exhibition, visitors read the following on the title panel facing the entrance of the Centre:

The Nazis and their collaborators murdered nearly 6 million Jews during the Holocaust. These images are a fragment of those who perished. Each victim is related to someone in our community (see Appendix A).

This constituted the only explanatory text of the exhibition and was intended to inform the viewer: all the images were people who perished and were related to local residents.
According to the curator, “this small piece of critical information was essential to the audience’s response” (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 16, 2005). The title of the exhibition appeared in this front panel along with a collage of some images of the faces from the exhibition. The exhibition did not have an explicit over-arching narrative, a chronology or themes. In the absence of these scaffolds, the viewers found themselves touring the exhibition guided solely by their own emotional response. By not being told how to look at the pictures, they were left on their own as to how to forge a relationship with the photographs. However, the curator stated that the viewers were somehow “directed in the sense that all the faces were placed in family groupings - this drew attention that couldn’t be missed by the viewer - these people were part of families connected here in Vancouver” (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

The only other texts were reflective quotes, one in each wall of the exhibition. These quotes were printed using press type; they were intentionally light grey on grey walls so that they were “quiet.” These captions were more “philosophical and contemplative” than informational; they reflected on the passage of time and memory. The curator describes them “like a whisper, as a shadow, not in the viewers’ face” (R. Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2007). Examples of these captions were:

We remember to stand alongside the bereaved and share the burden of their memory.
The candle is symbolic of the soul. As the flame burns, it turns into energy and disappears. So too-as the soul passes from this world, the physical body is no longer needed.

By the time most of the images were installed (April), visitors to the exhibition were confronted by the photographic images of hundreds of faces. The images were displayed in family groupings, with a space between them and with different configurations for every family. This arrangement was intended to convey the message that every family was different. Moreover, images of families would allow viewers to identify more with the people portrayed in the images since they would be reminded of their own families (R. Kremer, personal communication, January 18, 2005). These images showed men, women and children from different countries, different age groups, socio-economic levels, and religious orientations (secular and orthodox) living their everyday lives. The group images showed people in a variety of settings and occasions such as family celebrations, holidays, picnics. There were also portraits of couples, teenagers, children and babies. However, single portraits predominated since the emphasis of the exhibition was on the individuals (see Appendix B). Images of faces were enlarged as close as possible to natural size. According to the curator, this exhibition was meant to convey many different visual messages. By creating this exhibition, Kremer aimed to counteract the demeaning stereotype of the Jew depicted by the Nazis and the dehumanized victims in films. A guiding principle was not to show studio pictures, but ordinary snapshots. The exhibition was to convey the idea of people carrying on their ordinary lives, which snapshots reflected more naturally. The curator stated that by showing these images of people conducting their normal lives, most
viewers would be able to identify with them; moreover, this normalcy, would combat stereotyping. This “widens the definition rather than narrowing it” and is less “reductive,” noted the curator. She added, “the whole purpose was to fight against the abstraction of six million and to treat the victims each as an individual – this can’t be done with all six million, but could be done on this smaller and local scale” (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 28, 2008). According to the curator, the exhibition had to convey visually the idea of quantity and diversity of victims, but also to personalize them (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 16, 2005).

Description of the Images

The scanned face of the Holocaust victim was intended, according to the curator, to restore the personhood of the individual who died. Many of the photographs submitted to be scanned were very small, deteriorated, or part of a larger photograph with other people. When the victim appeared in photographs with other people, and the designer could not delete from the picture someone who had survived, the whole photograph would be scanned and the graphic designer would draw a circle around the face of the person who survived and would indicate “survived”. In most of the photographs that included survivors and non-survivors, the faces of the victims were the only ones scanned and enlarged. The curator thought that part of the process of humanizing the victims would be to enlarge their faces to make them closer to life size. The dimensions were 9” x 11”. The idea was that the viewer would confront mostly a face, not a picture, and that is why the team who worked on the exhibition (which included Frieda Miller, the then educational coordinator, the graphic designer, and two research assistants) titled it Faces of Loss, since the focus is on the faces.
Each image had a grey background and a grey border at the bottom. Captions, in white font and placed at the bottom left side of the image, indicated the name of the victim and their nationality. The grey border at the bottom of every photographic image included information about the circumstances of death (if known), how participants were related to the victim, the date the photograph was taken, and a caption in italics denoting a thought or memory related to the image of the person portrayed in the picture (not all the pictures included this caption). With only this information provided, the viewers were left to construct their own narrative (see Appendix C).

Idea that Informed the Creation of the Exhibition

The curator stated that the idea behind the creation of this exhibition was to focus solely on the victims with the goal of “humanizing what has become an abstraction of numbers” (Kremer 2005, p. 4). She added, “the constant quoting of numbers such as six million victims is so reductive as to dehumanize and objectify further” (R. Kremer, personal communication, January 18, 2005). The curator noted that when she began to think about memory, she asked herself, “how and what we should remember” (R. Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2007). Margalit’s, The Ethics of Memory, informed her thinking since the emphasis of this book is on how the Holocaust should be remembered and the ethics involved in the obligation to remember. Margalit considers remembering personal names as an ethical obligation. The curator recalls a passage in Margalit’s book that tells the story of a fallen soldier not named, and states, “that pointed the way for me and provided a theoretical framework” (R. Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2007). She decided, therefore, to create an exhibition informed by Margalit’s thesis that would serve as the philosophical foundation for
honouring the memory of those who died during the Holocaust. She decided to take Margalit’s idea further and design an exhibition intended to identify not only names, but faces. Kremer realized that after having curated many exhibitions at the VHEC that were historical in nature - the story of a ghetto or camp - she felt that “something had been missed or not addressed” (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

The curator believed that survivors have a personal sense of obligation to remember personal losses. Large institutions do not touch on this personal obligation, since these institutions are more focused on the Holocaust as an historical event. She added, “The touchstone with survivors is not the history of the Holocaust but that moment when they lost that beloved person, the last time they saw them” (emphasis mine, R. Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2007). She stressed the importance of capturing that moment, that obligation to remember, that notion of never forget, not the historical event, but the individual (R. Kremer, personal communication, emphasis mine, November 17, 2007). Thus, she sought to create an exhibition that would individualize that loss, aware that large museums such as Yad Vashem could not do this. Only in local Holocaust museums, patronized by a relatively small community, was this possible.

Kremer wanted to connect not only with the survivors and their children, but with the broader Jewish community which could include anyone who had a relative who perished during the Holocaust. People who were born in Canada and whose parents were not involved in the Holocaust could be part of this project if they had a relative who was killed during this period. This “pulled together the community with the survivors and the survivors with the community as well.” She declared, “it is that larger group I focused
on” (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 16, 2005). Kremer defined this larger group as the “community of loss”. This term referred to the group composed not only of Holocaust survivors, child survivors and second generation, but all those other members from the local Jewish community who had lost a relative during the Holocaust (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

Although the exhibition was developed with the goal of remembering and honouring the local community’s perished members, it also had an educational function. A central aim of the exhibition was that viewers, as they walked in and saw all those faces, would personalize the Holocaust and “get a sense of the enormity of the loss” (F. Miller, personal communication, February 21, 2005). As they read the captions, viewers would learn about the diverse backgrounds of the victims, the multiplicity of ways they perished, yet that they were all Jewish (R. Kremer, personal notes, undated). In order to accomplish the educational goal, Frieda Miller, then the educational coordinator of the VHEC, developed a teaching guide for docents that covered two threads: the cognitive aspect and the emotional one. Students visiting the exhibition were asked by the docents to read the captions to learn about the variety of victims and differing circumstances of their deaths, and were given the opportunity to engage emotionally with the pictures by talking with their group about a particular photograph that had made an impact on them (Miller 2005, p. 6). According to Miller, the school program was aimed at putting faces to the number of the six million, thus engaging the students with the photos “in an interactive way to help them humanize an incomprehensible statistic” (Miller 2005, p. 7). In addition to this activity, students learned about the history of some of the photographs that were scanned for the exhibition. This information was obtained
by Frieda Miller, who would contact many of the participants to learn about how the photographs ended up in their possession.

Although the focus was on the victims, all the photographs, from which individual images were taken, were brought into the centre by members of the local community. According to the curator, “the donor of the photo embodies the family’s collective loss and is also a carrier of memory” (Kremer 2005, p. 4). The relatives were included in the exhibition through the insertion of the caption beneath the displayed image that explained how the person who appeared in the photograph related to the person who submitted the photograph. In addition to the goal of re-humanizing the victims of the Holocaust, the exhibition also traced the gradual demise of the survivor community. Since survivors are dying, the curator of the VHEC felt that this exhibition would institutionalize their memories. Kremer pointed out that “at this moment, either the memory [of the Holocaust survivors] is institutionalized or gone.” She added that the VHEC would preserve those memories through the pictures deposited there, and the exhibit would also act as a vehicle for passing the memory of the victims on to the second and third generation (R. Kremer, personal communication, January 18, 2005).

Mounting the Exhibition

The curator describes Faces of Loss as an installation as much as an exhibition. She considers it an installation because it was not fixed but changed continuously as more images were being added every week. As she stated, “this [exhibition] was a gradual installation of batches of images, you could not capture this exhibition as a fixed one…it was open-ended” (R. Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2007). It was an ongoing project building on density, lineal footage and configuration. The idea
behind this continuously evolving installation was that the exhibition, in some sense, mirrored how the genocide happened, as an ongoing process with more and more people being murdered as time passed (Kremer, personal communication, November 17, 2008). The collecting process was done by inviting the local community to participate in the exhibition through several community publications and events: during the Holocaust Remembrance Day lecture, and advertising it in Zachor, the VHEC newsletter, and in the Jewish Western Bulletin, a local Jewish newspaper. The VHEC staff also sent a personal letter to all those survivors who had their relatives’ names inscribed in the memorial at the cemetery. This letter invited them to participate in the exhibition by booking an appointment in order to have their original photograph scanned. It clarified that the VHEC would not keep the photos. The invitation also specified that there was no limit on the number of images one family could place in the exhibition. This letter stated the aim of the exhibition:

We want to demonstrate to students and others that the six million Jews that died were not numbers but were real people who were loved, are still remembered and are mourned. Students will see that these victims came from many places and all were murdered or died as a direct result of the Holocaust. We want to give a face to those who perished. These innocent victims were the children, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and cousins of our local survivors and of others in our community.

The exhibition was created as an ongoing project, mounted over a set period with more images being added every week for the next three months. The curator assumed
that people would be encouraged to participate once they saw the first groups of images installed since potential participants needed to see what the Centre was doing with their pictures. As more images came in, it was necessary to rearrange the existing ones. The first installation began on the back wall, then expanded to the side walls and later to the two movable walls at the centre of the museum. The images were installed on the wall following a centre line drawn at eye level; the images were placed first at this eye-level line and then above and under that line. Ultimately, a total of 426 images, submitted by 130 community members, were installed in the VHEC.

The original idea was to start collecting the photos in February and have all of them scanned and digitalized by April, which was the initial deadline for submitting photos. According to this initial plan, the participants would have submitted the photographs by then, and the staff would have all the images installed and ready for the opening of the exhibition on April 13, 2005. However, this original plan could not be carried through as intended. There was an outburst of response in the community and people kept submitting photographs well after the deadline; thus, photos submitted in the following month (May) were still included in the exhibition even though the opening ceremony had passed. Photos that were submitted in the next few months (June and July) were still received and scanned; however, they were not installed on the walls but were included in the online exhibition. According to the curator, the idea of retaining *Faces of Loss* as an online exhibition was a way of continuing the process of commemoration. By creating an online version of *Faces of Loss*, the curator regarded it as an open-ended project, with the possibility that it could be augmented over time.
Participants started calling in to submit their pictures as early as January, even before the formal invitation to participate was sent out, which was done on February 1st. By mid-January, forty images had already been scanned. These were submitted by those survivors who attend the VHEC on a regular basis and were aware of the upcoming exhibition. The process of submitting the photographs started with booking an appointment with one of the research assistants. Since I had a background in counseling psychology and could anticipate some of the emotions that might get triggered during the intake interview, I volunteered to do many of these interviews which were intended to gather basic information about the victims that appeared in the photographs. A graphic designer, on staff, scanned and enlarged the pictures of the victims and, by the end of the intake interview, the original photographs were returned to the participants. In those cases where the participants had several pictures of the same person, the choice was made mainly by the graphic designer, a decision influenced mainly by determining which photo was closest to the age when the person perished. Decisions were also made based upon aesthetic criteria: the emphasis was on those photos which showed the face of the victims more clearly, and those ones that were less deteriorated.

As mentioned earlier, the exhibition was held at the VHEC from January to July 2005. By the end of July, participants were notified that the exhibition was being dismounted and that the images of their relatives were ready to be picked up. There was a quick response by the majority of participants; only a few did not come to the VHEC to obtain the digitalized images.
Participants

In recruiting participants for this study, I followed the ethnographic approach of accessing the participants through a “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 1998, p.117). The director of the VHEC allowed me to gain access to the participants by sending the recruitment letter that described my research, and inviting them to participate in it (see Appendix D). This communication was sent to all the 130 participants who provided images for the exhibition. For the selection of participants, I followed what Miles and Huberman describe as “criterion sampling”, meaning that all participants met some criterion (cited in Creswell 1998, p.119). In this type of sampling all the cases represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon under study. In this case, they all contributed images to the exhibition *Faces of Loss*.

Twenty eight participants contacted me and agreed to participate in my research project. The participants in this study included: a) Holocaust survivors: these were the participants who suffered under the Nazi regime by being removed from their homes and placed in ghettos or concentration camps; b) child survivors: this category was comprised of those participants who, as children, survived the Holocaust because they were hidden by non-Jewish families or were sent away to other countries; c) second generation: this term refers to the participants who were the offspring of Holocaust camp survivors and child survivors and were born after the war d) members of the broader community of loss: this category included those participants whose families had been living in Canada long before the Holocaust but had a relative who had perished during this event.

Of the total number of participants, nine were Holocaust survivors, five were child survivors, eleven participants were second generation, and three participants were
members of the broader community of loss. In addition to the individual interviews, I conducted one group interview with a group of nine child survivors during the first part of one of their monthly drop-in sessions.

**Holocaust and child survivors group:** The nine participants who were Holocaust survivors had been sent to a concentration camp, most of them to Auschwitz. The five child survivors had been hidden in homes or convents. In terms of gender, there were eight female and six male participants in these two sub-groups. They came from a variety of countries: Lithuania, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Russia, Holland and Poland. The age range of this group varied between sixty five and ninety years old. Most of the Holocaust survivors asked to be interviewed in their homes, while most of the child survivors were interviewed at the VHEC. The majority of these participants lived in the Vancouver area.

**Second generation group:** All of the eleven participants who belonged to this category were professionals who lived in the Lower Mainland area. Their ages ranged between 45 and 55 years old; in terms of gender, there were eight female and three male participants. The three members of the community of loss were male professionals whose families had immigrated to Canada from Poland and Russia. The three of them had lost one of more of their parents’ siblings as well as cousins during the Holocaust.

The participants were divided into two groups for the purpose of analysis: in one group were Holocaust and child survivors, and in the other, second generation and members of the community of loss. The rationale for grouping Holocaust survivors and child survivors in one category was based on the broader definition of Holocaust
survivors which includes all those Jews who suffered as a direct result of the Nazi policies. The inclusion of the three participants from the broader community of loss with the second generation grouping was done because the former had some demographic characteristics in common with the second generation participants (e.g. age range) and also had lost cousins and some of their parents’ siblings.

Data Collection

The data collection consisted of formally arranged individual interviews, one group interview, descriptive field notes, personal journal entries, texts about the exhibition in the form of newspaper and magazine articles, and excerpts of videotaped interviews made for VHEC’s 10th Anniversary Gala Dinner.

Individual Interviews

For the interviews with the participants, I designed an interview protocol (see Appendix E). These questions allowed me to conduct a semi-structured interview with them. I also designed a consent form (see Appendix F). These procedures were previously reviewed and approved by the UBC Behavioural and Research Ethics Board (see Appendix G). The participants for the study were the ones who contacted me. Over the phone, I explained to them who I was, the purpose of my study, the amount of time that would be needed to complete the interview and how I planned to use the results from the interview. I also arranged a convenient time and place for them to take the interview. In most cases, the telephone call was my first direct contact with the participants since despite my previous involvement with the setting up of the exhibition, I had not met most of the participants of this study. The introductory phone contact was an opportunity to establish some initial rapport with them.
I followed an interview approach described previously, where I attempted to minimize hierarchical relations with respondents. I also followed the principle that in order to interview my participants, I needed to build rapport between myself and them (Johnson 2001, p.109). During the telephone contact and the arranged individual interviews, I answered the respondents’ questions about my interest in the project. Personal questions came up with the majority of my interviewees: Was I Jewish? Where did I come from?, Were any of my relatives involved in the Holocaust? Why was I interested in doing this kind of research? I responded to these questions openly and honestly following Oakley’s feminist principle [that in interviewing] “there is no intimacy without reciprocity” (Oakley as cited in Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 658). Some participants did not ask these questions about me or my research project during the initial phone contact, but asked such questions later on when I interviewed them.

During the interviewing process, I devoted some time for casual conversation around the signing of the consent form. When my informant consented to start the interview, I turned on the digital recorder and began asking my questions. Since I was using a type of recorder that my participants might not be familiar with, I would explain that, “This is my recorder and I will start recording now.” In order to avoid distractions during the interview, I jotted down notes of the interview after it was over, when the participant was no longer present.

The interviews were transcribed later for analysis. I followed the approach that considers transcripts as interpretive texts (Mishler, 1991); constructed texts that involved my own voice as a researcher and were mediated by my interpretation (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 64). A common experience with many Holocaust survivors
was their straying from the interview questions. In transcribing these interviews, those responses that were unrelated to the topic of the exhibition were edited. Consequently, the transcripts of the interviews were not simply a verbatim record of the interview, but were informed by my own interpretation and decision making criteria. On this issue, Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) note, “Each researcher makes choices about whether to transcribe, what to transcribe and how to represent the record in text” (p. 66).

Group Interview

The group interview was done during the monthly child survivors’ drop-in session. I spoke with the coordinator of the group and asked him if he could ask the group if they would be willing to share with me their thoughts and feelings about the exhibition during their monthly session. The coordinator reported that the group was willing to meet with me during the first twenty minutes of their monthly session. When I met with the group of nine child survivors, I gave an abbreviated presentation of my research project, left time for questions and then proceeded to ask one general question. The question focused on how the group members felt about having their relatives’ images displayed in the VHEC. The group’s responses were taped and transcribed for analysis.

Descriptive Fieldnotes

The fieldnotes refer to the “information collected during participant observation” (Johnson & Johnson, 1990, p. 165) in the course of my fieldwork. They included my observations while in the field site and my spontaneous and informal conversations with participants, VHEC staff and members, and viewers. Included here also were personal journal entries that offered me the opportunity to write reflexively about my experiences, thoughts and feelings while conducting the research. These fieldnotes provided a record
of what some other participants, who did not volunteer to participate in my research had to say about the exhibition. The inclusion of these voices in my investigation, through reported speech and paraphrasing, allowed me to achieve a better balance in my sample since more voices of the community of loss could be represented. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), fieldnotes are useful in providing information about how the members of a group construct meanings of an experience since these notes provide information to the researcher on “naturally occurring talk and interaction” (p. 140).

**Documents**

These texts included newspaper articles about the exhibition, the printed texts produced by the VHEC regarding the exhibition *Faces of Loss*, the online texts about the exhibition created by the VHEC and two excerpts of interviews done by *Infinity Films*, the audio-visual company in charge of creating the video production for the VHEC’s Tenth Anniversary Gala Dinner. The interviewees for the production of this video were a Holocaust survivor and a middle aged woman who was a child of Holocaust survivors. Neither of them had been previously interviewed by me.

**Data Analysis**

**Transcripts**

A separate content analysis was done for each one of the two groupings of participants (Holocaust survivors and second generation). The analysis of the transcripts followed a structured procedure suggested in the literature on the analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Weber, 1985). I started with the reading of the transcripts several times to identify major organizing ideas. Following that, I
identified units of analysis, within each transcribed interview, that were participants’ descriptions related to the exhibition. I created a document for each one of the transcribed interviews selecting fragments of the interviews, (chunks of text, either sentences or paragraphs) that corresponded to the basic units of analysis I had previously identified. I proceeded to identify the different meanings revealed in those selected units and used codes to organize the selected chunks of texts. The codes appeared in bold letters next to the selected units of analysis. The language of the participant is preceded by my interpretation (in bold letters) of the meaning of the participants’ description.

Examples:

- **Exhibition as a place to honour memory publicly**: I have no idea how other people felt but to honour his memory publicly was for me a very good thing to do.

- **Exhibition as an opportunity to honour dead relatives in a different way**: I don’t know what the objective was or what R. [curator] had in mind but it has to do with providing an opportunity to honour the memory of people that we love in a different way than they had done before.

- **Exhibition as opportunity to talk to each other about losses**: But also to me, you got people talking to each other. Most people are very private but in looking at the photos they would say “come and look this is my grandfather, or this is my sister”. And the sadness on their faces that ‘they didn’t survive but I did’. That kind of thing… and for people to have had the opportunity to share this kind of thing with each other.

- **Exhibition as intergenerational transmission of memory**: I think it [exhibition] served its usefulness, its purpose. It had an unestimable amount of positive good to people, to the survivors and to the next generation because the second generation sometimes have issues, this gave them an opportunity to see what the survivors have lost, “this is what they lost, this is what they feel so sad about.

- **Exhibition as teaching students to personalize Holocaust**: I can only tell you that when the students see all these faces there and they know that these were actually people who didn’t survive, that these are pictures of an actual person who lived, loved and died. So I think there is an enormous value there.
This [exhibition] gave an unique opportunity to survivors, second generation, and general public, because members of the public saw this exhibition and saw people who lived, loved, and died and had feelings and terror and they ended their lives in a horrible, horrible way. So, here they see a face that connects them much more with what happened. A picture is worth a thousand words.

- **Exhibition as helping participants to move on:** It [exhibition] was mainly an opportunity to grieve but also to move on.

Following this, I made a list of all my codes (in bold letters written alongside the units of analysis), identified patterns of recurrence in these codes and proceeded to organize them by themes. For example, codes that referred to the exhibition as “**exhibition as honouring dead relatives**”, “**exhibition as a way of remembering Holocaust**”, “**exhibition as intergenerational transmission of memory**”, were clustered as sub-themes of the general theme **MEMORY**. Once the themes were identified, I went back to all the coded documents in order to identify recurrences in the sub-themes. This reduced the total number of sub-themes. In order to determine the frequency with which these sub-themes appeared in each participant’s text, I elaborated a table for survivors’ texts and another one for second generation (see Appendix H 1 and H 2). These tables allowed me to identify the range and salience of key concepts. Themes and sub-themes appear in rows and the participants’ responses in the columns.

**Example for the theme “Memory”:**

**Table 1. Memory**

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<th>Group interview</th>
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<td>MEMORY</td>
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<td>Honouring dead relatives (dr)</td>
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<td>Preserving memory of dr</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Group Interview

For the analysis of the transcript from the group interview, I followed the same structured process as for the individual interviews. I started with the reading of the transcript several times to identify major organizing ideas. After doing this, I identified units of analysis, created a document containing fragments of the interview, (chunks of text either sentences or paragraphs) containing descriptions of the experience related to the exhibition. I proceeded to identify the different meanings revealed in those selected units and used codes to retrieve and organize the selected chunks of texts. The codes appeared in bold letters next to the selected unit of analysis. The language of the participant appears with my interpretation (in bold letters) of the meaning of the participants’ description.

Example:

- **Exhibition as bringing the dead back:** The positive thing for me was that I had little pictures of my grandmother and because they were sort of blown up I really felt their presence which I hadn’t felt before, you know, it felt when I walked in as if they were actual people here.
The coded individual responses in the group interview were included in the analysis of the survivors’ text since the participants in the group interview were child survivors.

Documents

I examined two interviews done by Infinity Films, one of a Holocaust survivor and the other of a second generation. These two interviews were analyzed following the same procedure employed for the other transcripts. For the analysis of newspaper and magazine articles about the exhibition, I examined who wrote them, how these documents were written, for what purposes they were created, and on which occasions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p.172). These documents supplemented my information about the exhibit through examining the media publications about it.

Fieldnotes

I analyzed my field notes using the following procedure: I re-read them line by line, then I highlighted those chunks of text that were related to my research questions and to the themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts. I coded these sections and identified themes and patterns. Once the themes were identified, I related them to the main themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note the advantages of combining the field notes with the interviews, since “the data from each can be used to illuminate the other” (p.130). I also analyzed the entries that referred to my own personal reflections and feelings evoked while conducting this research. These entries provided me with an audit trail for my interpretations.
Rigor of the Study

In order to assess the validity of the study, I conducted a peer review and a member check. Doing so could affirm the credibility of the findings and share with the participants the results of my research.

Peer Review

Once my preliminary findings were available, I presented them to two child survivors who participated in the exhibition and whose professional practice was in the area of mental health. For many years, both had assumed leadership roles in activities within the VHEC. Although both participated in *Faces of Loss*, neither of them took part in the interview portion of my study. I presented them with a summary of the main findings of the study and asked them the following questions:

Do my findings resonate with your experience of the exhibition?

What do you believe is the value of these findings?

Member Check

Four years after undertaking the study, I sent a letter to all those who had participated in my investigation. In this letter, I explained that I had completed my study and that I was now willing to meet with those interested in learning about my findings (see Appendix I). The findings from the peer review and member check are discussed toward the close of chapter 6.

To summarize, this chapter discussed the methodology used for responding to the central question that guided this research: What are the meanings for the survivors and their children of engaging in an exhibition that brings the private losses into the public sphere? Given my research topic and question, I used a qualitative research paradigm
since my major concern was in understanding the participants’ subjective experience. This study, therefore, was based upon an ethnographic approach in which I immersed myself in the exhibition site for a period of seven months. I collected my data through participant observation, in-depth interviews, descriptive field notes, personal journal entries and texts about the exhibition, and I generated an ethnographic account shaped by my interactions and interpretations (Angrosino & Mays 2000, p. 675). The next two chapters report the findings that emerged through my interaction with the participants and the activities around *Faces of Loss*. 
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS: THE MEMORIAL ASPECT OF FACES OF LOSS

Engaging the Community in “a Memorial Exhibition”

We [those of us who work or volunteer at the VHEC] are “memory workers”. We mount exhibitions that mark a place of memory in the human landscape. The exhibition that we have just began to mount – Faces of Loss – is a memorial exhibition….the process of creating this exhibition is a commemorative act, looking at the faces and reading the text can be an act of commemoration. It [the exhibition] will not bring closure. It will not bring reconciliation or forgiveness. Our response is – that it fulfills an obligation to remember…. (R. Kremer, remarks at the Annual Holocaust Remembrance Day Lecture, January 27, 2005).

With these words, Roberta Kremer introduced her exhibition to those local residents who attended the Annual Holocaust Remembrance Lecture. Inviting the community to participate in this memorial project was vital to implement what would constitute the curator’s last project in the VHEC before her departure from the Centre. In the account that follows, I will narrate the journey I embarked on for the next six months as I became a participant observer in this memory project that resonated so deeply with the local community. Throughout my fieldwork and interviews I kept hearing remarks that this exhibition had been “la crème de la crème,” “the best exhibition ever mounted at the VHEC.” It seemed that this exhibition, unlike others, touched the local Holocaust survivors and their children at a very personal level. My central question was: What made the exhibition so meaningful for them?
Faces of Loss had two major aspects that made it so unique for the participants: a memorial one and a therapeutic one. In this chapter and the next, I discuss the results of my ethnographic study. Woven into this account are the main themes that surfaced through the individual and group interviews, the descriptive field notes, personal journal entries and texts about the exhibition generated by diverse media. In this chapter I will discuss the memorial aspect of this exhibition emphasizing how the community embraced a project aimed to “fulfill the obligation to remember” through submitting their precious personal photographs for display on the Centre’s wall. I begin this chapter by presenting the findings that describe the local community’s embrace of the VHEC as a site of memory and a venue for transmitting their memories to their children. I then present the findings that show how Faces of Loss became a powerful instrument for shaping memories and creating new connections with the vanished. I end the chapter by presenting other memories evoked by this exhibition. The following chapter discusses the therapeutic meaning that this exhibition had for the participants.

The Annual Holocaust Remembrance Day lecture gave the curator an opportunity to address a large audience composed of a significant number of Holocaust survivors and their children who, year after year, attend this memorial lecture, along with other people from the Jewish community and the broader community. During her appeal to the audience regarding the memorial exhibition, the curator poignantly asked,

What memory will remain of the Holocaust as time passes? What will be the tools of memory for future generations? Will it be the photographs of concentration camps, artifacts in museums, the accounts of survivors in films and memories, the texts of historians?
In inviting the audience to participate in the exhibition, the curator stressed its memorial nature and emphasized that the creation of this exhibition was a “commemorative act” in that “looking at the faces and reading the text can be an act of commemoration” (R. Kremer, personal communication, January 27, 2005). Unlike many Holocaust memorials consisting of architectural forms, this memorial would be a naturalistic visual representation of victims of the Holocaust. Young (1993) notes that many survivors question the use of abstract forms as mediums for embodying their experiences. The author quotes one survivor’s outrage, “We weren’t tortured and our families were not murdered in the abstract, it was real” (p. 9). This exhibition was offering to its community the possibility of an institutionalized remembering of their relatives that neither was lost in what Engelhardt (2002) describes as “non-representational vagueness” (p. 37) nor reliant upon the practices of inscribing victims’ name in a site of memory such as the local cemetery memorial or Yad Vashem’s Hall of Names.

Instead, the VHEC curator’s vision of a memorial exhibition with visual images of the local community’s losses reflected the change of perspective in how the Holocaust is presented in museums. This position challenges the representation of victims as submerged in an opaque totality of deaths, the anonymous and abstract number: six million. With the emergence of the “individualization paradigm” (Lassig & Pohl, 2007, p.158), the Holocaust has been personalized and given a concrete expression through presenting the names, faces and video-testimonies of the victims of the Nazi regime.

Appealing to the local Vancouver community’s sense of obligation to remember their personal losses and honour the memory of those who died during the Holocaust,
the curator of the VHEC launched a project that would maintain the institution’s mandate to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. Nevertheless, in contrast with other exhibitions that had been mounted at the VHEC, this one would end up resonating at a deeper personal level with the members of the local community as it tapped into their innermost private memories and encouraged them to think about their personal losses in relationship to the local community’s losses.

A second generation interviewee epitomized the importance of the exhibition as a memorial for the local Holocaust community,

This [referring to the exhibition] is my favourite memorial because the big ones across the world seem too big for me, maybe they are good historically but this one actually means something in a family way….I am surprised that this was not done before.

The VHEC Becomes the Repository of the Local Community’s Memories of Loss

Turning the VHEC into a repository of the local community’s memories was a central goal for the curator of the exhibition. She told me that as survivors died, their memories of their lost relatives would be either “institutionalized or gone” adding that “with their pictures deposited here, this centre will preserve their memories” (R. Kremer, personal communication, January 27, 2005). The curator’s comment reflects a concern common among Holocaust memory scholars and museum curators. As the generation of Holocaust survivors disappears, they are dying with the memories they carry, so that, as Kusno (1997) notes, the responsibility for sustaining Holocaust memory is passing from individuals and communities to institutions. Despite the fact that mega projects
have as a mandate the preservation of memories, it is local museums that respond
directly to the local Holocaust survivors’ need to have, what Linenthal (1995) describes
as a “house of memory” (p. 256). The VHEC, like other Holocaust centres throughout
the world, has assumed the function of what Nora (1989) calls “lieux de memoire” (p. 7).
For Nora, modern memory is above all “archival” and “relies entirely on the materiality”
and “visibility of the image” (p.13).

The curator was determined to have the VHEC store those memories, by, as
Crane (2000) suggests, bringing them down from the “mental world” and “literally”
placing them in the “physical world” (p. 3). It was only through a project like *Faces of
Loss* that the VHEC could become the community’s memory storehouse, forging
endangered memories into physical form.

I vividly recall an incident when a woman, approximately in her late fifties, walked
into the Centre sometime in late May. By that time, the intake interviews were over, all
the photographs had been scanned, the opening had taken place, most of the school
group visits were over, and it was just a few weeks before the exhibition was to be
dismounted. She had just found out about the exhibition through an acquaintance, and
wanted to submit a photograph of her deceased mother’s first husband. When a
member of the staff explained to her that it was too late to have it scanned and mounted
in a foam core and installed in the exhibition, she got very upset and said, “I am the only
one to carry on his memory,” and breaking into tears sobbed, “when I am gone, there
will be no one to remember him anymore…it [photograph or memory?] has to be kept
somewhere.”
The curator sorted out this situation by having the picture scanned and by promising the distressed woman that the picture would be included in the online version of the exhibition. This online project commenced shortly before the exhibition was dismounted. It is very unlikely that this situation could have emerged in a large mega Holocaust museum where the museum curators and the community do not interact. Even so, Lavine (1992) asserts that community museums’ obligations to their communities lie at the heart of their mission (p. 139). The VHEC’s curator could respond to the local community members’ need to prevent time’s erosion of the memory of their beloved ones. Having their relatives’ pictures as part of the Centre’s memorial exhibition meant, for the community of loss, a way of inscribing their private memories into the landscape of the community’s memory.

**Responding to the Appeal to Bring the Private Memories into the Public Space**

In early February 2005, Holocaust survivors, child survivors and relatives who inscribed their relatives’ names in the Holocaust Memorial at the Schara Tzedeck Cemetery, received an invitation to participate in the VHEC’s *Faces of Loss* exhibition. The letter sent to them read,

As you have inscribed names at the Memorial we wanted to invite you to have photographs in the exhibition….we want to give a face to those who perished. Those innocent victims were the children, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and cousins of our local survivors and of others in our community. Nevertheless, the invitation to participate in the exhibition was directed to what the curator described as the whole “community of loss.” As explained earlier, this term
referred to all those members of the local Jewish community who had lost a relative during the Holocaust. The response to the invitation to submit photographs to be scanned for the exhibition was felt immediately. The ads in the local Jewish newspaper, the VHEC Newsletter Zachor, the words delivered by the VHEC during the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day talk, and the local community’s word of mouth prompted more than 140 community members to start calling the VHEC. These calls were to book appointments in order to submit for scanning their cherished family photographs that up until then had been confined to the privacy of their homes.

From January until May and beyond, members of the local Jewish community kept coming to the VHEC to have their relatives’ pictures included in the exhibition. Pictures that had been displayed at homes or stored away in drawers, photo albums, boxes, and even hidden from family members, were brought to the Centre. The exhibition also encouraged survivors to contact relatives all over the world to request photographs. Local survivors and their children were actively engaged in contributing their personal photographs to mount an exhibition that would be seen not only by the local Jewish community but by the nearly 5000 students from schools over the Lower Mainland who attend the VHEC’s exhibitions every year. This exhibition represented the first attempt to expose the personal losses to a broader audience that went beyond the confines of the Jewish community. The outpouring of response by the local community illustrates the transformation in Holocaust remembrance practices that has occurred in the past two decades, such that these practices need not be confined to the private sphere.
Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the idea of bringing the private to the public was not equally embraced by all the members of the community of loss. In a conversation I had with a child survivor who was at the VHEC, he said,

I have these two pictures, one of my father and one of my mother and they are not hanging up in that exhibition [because] looking at the pictures here, I don’t know if my parents would have wanted to have their pictures hanging here with those of other people, you know, somehow it feels as if…ah…they are exhibited…I don’t think they would have wanted that.

I could understand his view. However, it contrasted starkly with the kind of responses I had been hearing from other participants. It seemed that for those participating in the exhibition, the anxiety about intrusion and exposing their relatives to the gaze of a possibly unknown audience did not prevail over the desire to have their relatives’ images posted in the VHEC’s memorial exhibition. During the intake interviews, when participants submitted their pictures to be scanned, a few of them confided to me that it was challenging to have their precious photos displayed in an exhibition, since they were very “private” people. Nevertheless, they decided to set their privacy concerns aside and participate in this project.

Enthusiastic participants would frequently ask, “How come this has not been done before?” They did not seem to realize the enormous changes that have occurred in our cultural landscape in the past 30 years. An exhibition of this kind could not have been imagined three decades ago when society had not yet reached what Wieviorka (2006) describes as “the era of witness” (p. xv). Before the 1980’s, the social conditions that enable these kinds of ventures to occur did not exist. It is only in the last twenty-
five years that there has been an upsurge of projects bringing the private memories of
the Holocaust survivors to the public arena. Wieviorka explains that Holocaust
memories were confined within "closed, family-like groups" (p. 55) in the period
immediately following the Holocaust, and it was not until Eichmann’s trial when
Holocaust survivors first emerged from the private to the public sphere through their
testimonies (p. 88). Wierviorka argues that private memories were able to penetrate the
public sphere because there was a social demand for these memories (p. 51).
Reflecting this social trend, many local survivors have been very active in the VHEC’s
outreach programs and testimony recollection project over the last two decades. Many
of the survivors who participated in the exhibition had been previously involved with
such projects carried on by the VHEC. These circumstances enabled and facilitated
their own participation and their children’s in a venture that required them to bring to the
public space something very private and personal, such as their family’s photographs. A
Holocaust survivor describes this passing from the private to the public as an “avenue”
saying,

If there is nothing out there and nowhere except in my heart, so it stays in my
heart and nowhere else. But this [exhibition] is something like an avenue that has
been extended from my house.

Another Holocaust survivor’s comment illustrates a change of mentality in the use
of public space,

I am a member of this community and this is my family. I do not have anything to
hide. On the contrary, I am very pleased in the interest shown in what I have
been keeping at home…to have them [parents] on a wall in a public place, I think it is very good.

Preserving the Memory of the Perished Ones

Remembering plays a very important role in Jewish religious practice. Yerushalmi (1982) uses the Hebrew word zakhor (remember) to underscore the pivotal role of remembrance in the Jewish tradition. The author notes that the biblical injunction to “remember,” in addition to the rituals and recital, were meant to reinforce memory (p.11). Remembering the dead is a quintessential practice in Judaism. Mourners recite Kaddish every year on the anniversary of their loved ones’ death. This recitation has different meanings, such as bringing salvation to the dead person or having the mourner seek the presence of God, in spite of the injustice felt by death (Blumenthal, 2001, “The Mourner’s Kaddish,” para.1). Blumenthal suggests that reciting Kaddish in Holocaust remembrance ceremonies, “is an expression of solidarity with the victims…and identification with the Jewishness that binds the victims to us” (Blumenthal, 2001, “After the Shoah”, para. 5). In reflecting on the Biblical instruction to remember the name, Margalit (2002) posits that preserving the memory of the dead, through reciting their name, is intimately connected with magical thought such that “if the name survives, the essence somehow survives” (p. 23). This author further elaborates on the connection between preserving the memory of the dead and caring. In establishing the link between the two, memory becomes “partly constitutive of the notion of care” (p. 28).

When I conducted the interviews for my research project, I discovered that for most of my interviewees, having their dead relatives’ images and names displayed in the exhibition meant a way of preserving their memory. Comments like the ones cited
below illustrate the importance of *Faces of Loss* in helping participants fulfill their obligation to remember. These comments converge on the notion of preserving the memory of their perished relatives, although participants convey their meanings in different ways.

We have to remember. This is our motto, to remember. I think you are doing a wonderful job, that [exhibition] is another way to remember them [dead].

(Holocaust. survivor)

For this participant, the exhibition offers another medium to fulfill the survivors’ obligation to remember her dead relatives. This participant had already been involved in other projects such as inscribing her relatives’ names in the local cemetery Holocaust memorial and sending her relatives’ information to Yad Vashem. This exhibition allowed her to continue with her mandate of “to remember.”

Another participant said,

This [exhibition] provides an opportunity to honour the memory of people we loved in a different way than we had done before. This [exhibition] was an opportunity just to remember him [grandfather] and pay tribute to him, honour his memory and say, “I want to remember all the good things about you, not the way you died.” (child survivor)

For this child survivor, it is having the image of her dead grandfather displayed that allows her to honour his memory, but a memory associated with the image of her grandfather in his pre-Holocaust life. In discussing pre-Holocaust pictures in the Tower of Faces (USHMM), Liss (1998) states, “They give something to hold on to, to embrace” (p. 69).
In a similar vein, a Holocaust survivor explained, “When I submitted my precious pictures to the exhibition, it was a way of telling them [dead relatives] that they are not being forgotten.” It seems that for this participant, the act of bringing to the VHEC something so precious for her, was a statement to her relatives about her commitment to perpetuate their memory through showing their faces. Through the vibrancy of a pre-Holocaust picture, the participant is fulfilling her mandate to remember her loved ones.

For other participants, the exhibition was a way of empowering them and giving them a sense of agency in the preservation of their dead relatives’ memory.

I feel that I am doing something that is very constructive [participating in the exhibition] [what] I am doing is positive and will not allow these people who were so loved to be forgotten. To simply disappear…(second generation)

This comment also illustrates how the exhibition was perceived as an “antidote” for preventing the memory of those beloved relatives to simply “disappear” with the passing of time. The knowledge that their precious photographs would eventually become part of a digital archive was for some participants an assurance that their relatives’ memory would not “simply disappear” when, they too, were deceased.

In reflecting about the fate of the only photograph he has of his parents together, Barthes (1980) writes, “someday [it will] be thrown out…it is love -as-treasure which is going to disappear forever, for once I am gone, no one will be able to testify to this, nothing will remain but an indifferent Nature…” (p. 94).

Throughout my research, I realized that the impact of the exhibition surpassed its expressed function as a site of memory since it not only provided a space for remembering, but also facilitated the transference of memory to the next generations.
and played a crucial role in shaping those memories, creating new connections with those shown in the displayed images.

**Intergenerational Transmission of Memories**

Many Holocaust survivors and child survivors spoke very little about their past to their children, but paradoxically wanted the memory of their absent loved ones to be carried on by the following generation. Participating in the exhibition *Faces of Loss* was seen by many of the participants as a means of transmitting this memory of the dead parents and relatives to their children. A Holocaust survivor told me, “The exhibition is just to continue the legacy of the family to the generations that come next.” Another participant, a child survivor, responding to why he had participated in the exhibition said, “I want to leave my legacy for my children, so they remember too.” For another child survivor, his participation was determined by his son’s assurance that he would attend the exhibition if the relatives’ images were up. The interviewee stated, “The fact that my son would say he would attend was the ‘overriding’ reason I decided to take part…I felt in a way this should be something that I should leave him for future generations.”

A substantial body of literature has examined how the children of Holocaust survivors and child survivors have dealt with their parents’ Holocaust memories (Epstein, 1979; Hirsch, 1999; Hoffman, 2004; Karpf, 1996; Wardi, 1992). Epstein (2001) writes, “memory is ongoing, unerasable and passed from one generation to the next” (p. 188). In discussing the intergenerational transmission of memory, Wardi (1992) explains how these children have been receiving the message from their parents to preserve the memory of the dead throughout their lives (p. 46). In her practice as a psychotherapist, Wardi observed that one child is usually designated by the parents with the special
mission of becoming the “memorial candle” for all the relatives who perished during the Holocaust. According to Wardi, the choice of the child who will become the “memorial candle” is related to factors such as their physical resemblance to the dead relative, the time they were born, and their being of the same sex as the figure who perished (p. 32).

The exhibition *Faces of Loss* presented the “memorial candles” of the local second generation children with the opportunity to participate in a project that would enable them to preserve the memory of their dead relatives. In my research interviews with second generation participants, I was struck by the fact that those children who had submitted photographs of their dead relatives mentioned that they were the memory keepers of the family. In their role as “memorial candles”, they had been involved in all those projects aimed to preserve the memory of their dead relative. Some of them had engaged in genealogical projects such as working on a family tree; others had participated in the Gesher project at the VHEC which consisted mainly in working with Holocaust memories through art. Some others had been engaged in collecting pictures and letters from their dead relatives, and most of them ensured that their relatives names were inscribed in the memorial at the Jewish cemetery.

The comments made by one second generation participant illustrate the role of the “memorial candle”: “I will be the keeper…their lives are very important for me to remember, recognize and honour….I want to let their spirits and souls be remembered.” During the course of our interview, this participant kept stressing his “need” to get involved in all sorts of memory projects aimed to honour the memory of his dead relatives. “It is something I have to do, without question” he stressed. In his role as the
“memorial candle” of the family, this participant is deeply concerned with honouring the memory of his relatives.

Wardi further suggests that the “memorial candles” are most concerned with repairing the links that have been broken between their parents and their extended families (p.31). Engaging in the task of rebuilding a family tree might serve this purpose.

The comment of another second generation participant illustrates this, “Long before I saw the announcement about this exhibition, I had already reconstructed my family tree…I know pretty much what happened to everybody….I didn’t know this before when my parents were alive…”

In discussing the role of the “memorial candle” in the family, Wardi notes that since one child of the family has assumed that role, the others are “liberated” from that burden. The task of being the memorial candle of the family can be taxing for the one who is performing this role. Most accept their role as the one in the family duty-bound to preserve those Holocaust memories, but some memorial candles expressed their frustration about their siblings’ lack of involvement in this responsibility. One second generation participant shared the following concern with me,

In every family there is always somebody who is more interested in the family history than the others and I am the one who seems to be more involved in keeping the pictures and thinking about these things…I am the one who is telling them [siblings], “this is what I am doing, and you should be interested in this.”

Nonetheless, Faces of Loss was able, in some cases, to involve those siblings who until the time of the exhibit had been uninvolved with the process of preserving their family’s Holocaust past. During my intake picture process, two sisters showed up for the
intake interview. One sister, the memorial candle, had asked her sister to help her find more photographs for the exhibition and, to her surprise, her sister offered to accompany her to the intake interview. In the past, this sister had refused to become involved with the family history, arguing, “this is just history…..I do not feel part of it”. However, her willingness to participate, along with her sister, in *Faces of Loss*, was actually the first time that the role of the “memorial candle” was shared by the two sisters. The rationale participants gave for this sudden involvement of their siblings was very much related to the personal nature of the exhibition and the fact that something so private was going to become public. Unlike other memory projects that had remained within the boundaries of the private sphere, in order to participate in *Faces of Loss* the “memorial candles” felt that they needed to have their siblings’ support to bring those private memories into the public sphere. As one participant put it, unlike other projects, this “could not be a unilateral decision.”

One important issue for the second generation is the duty to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. On this issue, Eva Hoffman (2004), a second generation child, asks: “most of us, of course, do not have memories of the Shoah….how are we going to pass on those meanings to subsequent generations?” (p. ix). Hoffman describes the difficulties involved for those entrusted as the carriers of memory to perpetuate memories that were more like a “chaos of emotions” “flashes of imagery” ”abrupt fragmented phrases” rather than coherent narrations (p. 9). A project like *Faces of Loss* offered these memorial candles the opportunity to perform their assigned role by bringing in tangible, concrete images of their deceased ancestors.
Becoming a Carrier of Memory Myself

Having been actively involved in the intake interviews, I had had the opportunity to share with participants their memory work that had been triggered by submitting their photographs. After asking for basic information such as name, phone number, name of the person in the photograph, and place of birth, I proceeded to ask them about the persons in the photographs, who they were, how they perished, and how they were related to the participant.

As the interview progressed, so did the depth of my questions: “When you look at the photographs, what are your thoughts now? What are your thoughts on the need to remember those you lost? What do you want others to remember about this person?” These questions elicited memories and stimulated emotions in the participants. As I listened to the memories evoked by the interview and looked at those shown in the photograph, I bore witness to the tragic destiny of the person that appeared in the photograph. Posing to be photographed, they appeared happy and confident. What struck me most was what Sontag (1973) described as “the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction” (p. 70). As I learned about those dead relatives, I became another carrier of memory for that particular person whose story was being unearthed as the participant revisited those memories and shared them with me.

As the scanned images came back to the Centre after being professionally mounted on foam core in order to be installed, I saw myself responding to the personhood of the image I was contemplating. I was not a detached spectator, rather, I felt somehow connected to the images I was viewing, especially those whose stories I knew. As the installation progressed, more and more wall space was covered by faces of children, mothers, fathers, grandfathers, with their many stories that were talking to
me. I felt the need to become the one who had the task of lighting the memorial candle each day at the exhibition. In my personal journal I wrote,

Through my very listening, I have become like a co-owner of their memories.

Those fathers, mothers, children, grandparents and other relatives that appear in those photographs have become part of my memories too. The survivors leave the Centre, but their photos stay, and everyday, as I carry out my daily activities in the centre, and look at those faces, their stories come back to me. I feel I have become a bearer of those memories.

**Shaping Memories**

*Faces of Loss* was not only about remembering their relatives through the pictures they possessed; the participants were confronted with images of relatives they had not seen before. One of the informing ideas in creating this exhibition was that the viewer would confront mostly a face, not full body picture, which is why the curator called it *Faces of Loss*. In order to achieve this, the images had to be large enough to make them close to life size. With the original photographs scanned and modified through the use of Photoshop, what the participants saw mounted on the walls were images that differed from the photographs they had kept throughout these years. The enlarged images were very powerful: most survivors had not seen the faces of their relatives in that way. Part of the psychological impact was seeing those faces modified by Photoshop so that they now appeared with a kind of clarity never seen before. *Faces of Loss* was not only about remembering but also about shaping the participants’ visual memories of their deceased relatives. This shaping of memory through the new images created for the exhibition is exemplified by a Holocaust survivor who, upon seeing the
installed image of his mother, remarked, “I have a picture of her in my brain that is
different from the one here…this one shows her features.”

Viewing the modified images of her grandfather, a woman Holocaust survivor,
commented, “I can see his face again, as I remembered him when I was a child.” For
the past years, her memory of her grandfather was mediated by the only picture she
had of him which was a small full body portrait.

A second generation participant conveyed his sense of shock about the picture of
his grandparents and uncle that was installed at the exhibition since it looked so
different from the one he had at home,

The photo caught my eye…all of a sudden I realized who it was and it shocked
me, I did not expect that reaction…the enlargement was there, it was not how it
was at home…it was right there…

Creating New Connections

The digitally altered images had a particularly important impact for some of the
second and third generation family members. Seeing these images allowed them to
connect with their deceased family relatives in a new way. First, by looking at the
enlarged images the participants were able to see physical resemblances with their
dead relatives that they had not seen before. The curator shared with me how one third
generation young woman walked into her office after having seen displayed the image
of her grandmother and told her what a shock it had been to find such an astonishing
resemblance with her deceased relative (R. Kremer, personal communication, February
1, 2005).
Second and most important, the exhibition gave the children the opportunity to
gaze at these images and feel a connection and familiarity with the family members
shown in them, as illustrated by this second generation participant’s reaction to the
installed images of her grandparents,

I think this [exhibition] just brings them closer to me since they are real people
and more than just…ah…some ideal of grandparents. The faces are bigger than
on the little photograph and also….they feel like my relatives now…people that
were my parents’ parents and died…but they are people that I missed meeting.

Hirsch (1997) reflects on the “power” of photography in family life and argues that
photography is the “family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation -
the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated” (pp. 6-7). In
discussing pre-Holocaust family photographs, this author argues that they are
documents of memory for survivors and “postmemory” for their children. She defines
postmemory as that memory of the Holocaust that second generation children have
which is mediated by generational distance and history. Hirsh explains, “postmemory
characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that
preceded their birth….stories of the previous generations that can be neither understood
nor recreated” (p. 22).

The images displayed at the exhibition acted as a powerful link between
generations providing the second and third generation with the opportunity to look at
images of their relatives in a very different way than they had done in the past.
Alongside the new memories created by the displayed images, new connections were
being created as well. Having grown up in environments where the Holocaust was
virtually banned from the family’s conversations, for many second generation children photographs of their dead relative were often the only material emanation of a past not spoken about, but these visual testaments were not easily accessed. For example, a second generation woman told me how difficult it was for her to ask her father to show her the photographs of her grandparents. The pictures were kept away from view.

…they [the photographs of her grandparents] were sort of a sacred thing…and he didn’t want to have them all over the house and talk about them because it was too painful…he maybe showed them to me maybe once or twice…it was too hard for him. It [Holocaust] was very much in there [in the home environment], but not the photographs.

This participant’s comment reflects the experience of many second generation children: living with ever-present losses that had no concrete shape. Those photographs of their dead relatives, which could have helped them form a mental image and establish a familial connection with them, were part of the secrecy that surrounded everything related to their parents’ past.

Hoffman (2004) notes that children of survivors inherit a transferred loss rather than a transferred memory and, as a second generation child, she questions, “How can one get over loss that has no shape or face?” (p73). In the same vein, Kahane (2001) asks, ”How do we mourn an absence? Can we grieve without having a specific image of loss?” (p. 30). These kinds of questions emphasize the second generation’s need to have some form of memory that will allow them to eventually grieve a past that they did not experience but that nonetheless is very central in shaping their inner world. The visual display of the enlarged faces of their relatives provided them with the medium to
relate and connect to those mysterious, ghostly figures they were dimly aware of since their early years, leaving them with disturbingly elusive impressions.

During the interviews, several second generation participants emphasized to me the importance of “visually remembering” their perished relatives. Having their relatives’ images displayed, one participant told me, helped him relate to his relatives, “It is something you can relate to when you look at, it is concrete.” The photographs became a visual point of connection between generations. In contrast to the difficulty of understanding the family’s fragmented narratives about such an unimaginable event, the photographs allowed the children and grandchildren to grasp a “material emanation of a past reality” and provided them with a “material connection” to that past (Hirsh 1997, p. 6). A survivor reported to the curator that after his grandchildren had seen the displayed images of their dead relatives, they seemed more “involved” with them and would mention them more in their conversations (R. Kremer, personal communication, February 1, 2005).

The ethereal figures of the relatives not only became concrete images but also lively, happy people carrying on their normal lives, posing for a picture that would immortalize a special moment. Helen Epstein, a well known pioneer on the impact of the Holocaust on survivors’ children, commented at a Second Generation Conference, “Our handicap, that of the Second Generation, is that we were not given any memories” (as cited in Shoshan, 1989, p. 201). Shoshan (1989) takes Epstein’s comment further and explains that what the second generation really lack are “happy memories” to “connect them [dead relatives] to life before the Holocaust” (p. 201). Much of the literature on the second generation discusses the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Bar On,
This poses the question of whether other than traumatic memories can be passed on to the second generation. *Faces of Loss* can be seen as a vehicle for shaping and transmitting such memories to the succeeding generations.

**Other Memories**

**Painful Memories**

For many participants, the mounted images elicited reactions not specifically intended by the curator. In contrast to the responses that pointed toward the power of those aesthetic images to preserve their beloved ones’ memory, or reconnect them with their pre-Holocaust memories, I was struck by the pained responses evoked by the exhibition. Particularly striking was a child survivor’s response when I asked him about his first impression upon seeing his relatives’ images displayed,

> My first impression was to realize the tragedy of my loss. It really hit home. Ok, we honour them by putting them up, but I had to face the stark reality that I could have had this beautiful, big family, so of course when all these pictures are on the wall, they are a very powerful reminder of my loss. Others [survivors] tell me, “you are so lucky you got so many pictures.” But the pictures symbolize the loss in my opinion, they magnify it because I see them and think, “this is what I could have had.”

A Holocaust survivor, when asked what it was for her to see the mounted photographic images of her dead relatives, responded,
I found this exhibition overwhelming, so many pictures, so many people… I just could not look at the pictures anymore… it was just too much. It sort of reminded me when I entered Auschwitz… I could not look at it anymore.

For this participant, having her parents’ images displayed had been motivated by her desire to “do almost anything” to give her parents the “acknowledgement” she felt they deserved. The exhibition, despite the pain it evoked, was a way to preserve the memory of her parents. She added, “So I feel I have done everything I could to bring back their memory a little bit…”

These narratives illustrate the different meaning-making activity that the exhibition triggered in the participants. The exhibition became “lieux de memoire” (Nora, 1989), engaging participants in active memory work; nevertheless, the meaning that participants constructed out of viewing these images and the memories incited by them could be quite different. In discussing photographs and their role in eliciting and shaping memories, Burnett (2004) reminds us that the meanings of photographs will be constructed by viewers in a collaborative process that takes place between the viewer and the image (p. 32). The images did not come to the participants, as Burnett would argue, in the form of “tabula rasa” rather, the viewers entered into a “creative engagement” (p. 32) with them (Burnett, 2004).

Excluded Memories

The VHEC exhibition *Faces of Loss* aimed to provide the community of loss with a social and cultural context to facilitate the participants’ engagement in remembrance practices. However, the main idea that informed this exhibition, that of remembering the community’s losses through “faces” that had been “lost,” proved exclusionary to those
members who lacked photographs of their lost relatives. With the emphasis on visual testimony, other memories associated with the victims were excluded, be they names, stories, or possessions. The curator’s objective was to create an exhibition about images: names or stories without an image could not be part of it.

Unlike to those members of the community who owned photographs of their deceased relatives, there were many others who could not recover any family photographs after the Holocaust. As the exhibition progressed, the local Jewish community became more aware of the project and more and more participants would walk in to submit photographs to be scanned. However, some of those without a photograph came to the Centre to request that their relatives’ names be added to the VHEC’s memorial project. One of those relatives approached me and bitterly intoned, “names just names, that is all what we have left, names and numbers.” Members of the community would approach the curator with ideas about how to include their relatives in the exhibition. One suggested a wall with a list of names. Another survivor, very involved with the activities of the Centre, suggested that the curator include the names of the deceased, for whom there were no visual images, on empty frames. Although these suggestions were not accepted, the curator included the names of those without photographs in the online exhibition. This decision was made later on when the idea of creating an online exhibition was adopted. In the meantime, there was tension among those who felt excluded from a project aimed to “fulfill the obligation to remember.”

One non-participant stated,

I have no pictures…for those of us who do not have pictures, there is no acknowledgment of them [dead relatives], if there is no face, at least a name to
be remembered…those who have pictures out here are very lucky…in some ways the exhibition is great, it is pictorially great, but as far as meaning is concerned, it missed out a part of those of us who do not have pictures.

The tensions that emerged regarding the inclusion of names without pictures point to the difficulties of setting up an exhibition that can be fully inclusive. Witcomb (2003), following Bennett’s argument that there will always be one group who will claim it is not being represented, states that museums “will always be open to the charge of being unrepresentative” (p. 80). In discussing the tension that arose between the curator and those who did not have a photograph, the curator explained to me that “we have to keep a balance between the survivors’ needs and our mandate,” and she stressed that exhibitions are always “controversial.” However, since the VHEC is a community-based organization, she acknowledged that there are grounds for dialogue between the curator and the community.

In an exhibition resonating so profoundly with the participants’ personal lives, any detail that the participants’ felt had misrepresented the memory of their relatives was quickly brought to the curator’s attention. Such concerns mainly referred to the text that accompanied each photograph. On several occasions, participants found a typo or spelling mistake in the captions of the images displayed. They felt very insulted about that omission or mistake and demanded corrections since the picture “could not be up there” as it was. That meant that the foam core image had to be redone, however, the curator was able to accommodate these demands.

The tensions generated by “excluded memories” were not limited to those who did not have pictures. Another group, Russian veterans living in Vancouver, wished to
be included in this project. Several families came over to the VHEC to submit for scanning the photographs of their relatives killed in action while serving in the Red Army. Despite the curator’s explanation that the mandate of the exhibition was limited to those who died during the Holocaust as a direct result of the Nazi’s extermination policies, they claimed that their relatives needed to be part of the exhibition since “our fathers and brothers fought the Nazis and were killed by the Nazis too.” During one of my intake interviews, I was confronted with one of these situations and had to reject the precious photos a Russian woman was submitting in order to have her deceased father be part of “those important people” [images displayed] and have “other people remember him.” The circumstances of her father’s death, however, did not befit the mandate of the exhibition (he was killed while serving in the Red Army). It was very hard for me to see this teary woman, who could barely move and needed to be helped by her son, dismally walk away. I then realized that for many of these Russian families, who had come to Vancouver only in the last fifteen years, this exhibition was not only an opportunity to preserve and institutionalize the memory of their dead relatives but also a way of achieving their inclusion in a larger community, the “community of loss.”

These incidents that occurred during my fieldwork exemplify what Lavine and Karp (1991) refer to as the “inherent contestability of museum exhibitions” (p. 1). The decision about who was to be included in the exhibition triggered controversy and debate among the local community of loss. The VHEC museum space became a forum wherein different groups of the local community contested the mandate of the exhibition. Lavine and Karp also point out that the struggle over what to exhibit is not only over “what is being represented but over who controls the means of representing” (p.15). In
This case, the curator envisioned and implemented this memory project thereby controlling whose and what memories were to be kept.

*Faces of Loss* was envisioned by Kremer as a memorial project aimed to “provide a space for survivors who carry an obligation to remember” and to “facilitate and encourage the transference of memory to the next generation” (Kremer, 2005).

Unlike other exhibitions designed by the curator mainly to fulfill the educational mandate of the VHEC, *Faces of Loss* had, as its principal intent, its memorial aspect. In contrast with other initiatives aimed to preserve the memory of the dead relatives, which have included projects such as inscribing their names in the memorial at the local cemetery or submitting their names to Yad Vashem, engaging in genealogical projects, writing about the family’s history etc., the creation of an exhibition with photographic images of the vanished loved ones allowed the participants to engage in a process of memory work that was above all visual.

To summarize, this chapter discussed central themes that emerged throughout the interviewing process and field work. These themes appeared consistently between those Holocaust survivors and second generation members who agreed to participate in my research interviews, and those other participants in *Faces of Loss* who did not take part in my interviewing process but whose thoughts and feelings about the exhibition were gathered mainly through spontaneous conversations and observations in the course of my fieldwork.

As discussed throughout this chapter, *Faces of Loss*, as a memorial project, engaged participants in diverse memory work processes as they brought to the public sphere those objects that had remained in the privacy of their homes. The display of
photographic images of their relatives was seen by many participants as a way of honouring the memory of their dead relatives and giving public acknowledgment to their existence. The exhibition, mounted in the museum space of the VHEC, provided participants with the confidence that the memory of their lost relatives would not disappear, as had their murdered relatives; instead, those memories were now incorporated into a site of memory, an institutional venue that would ensure their preservation for future generations.

The use of photographic images proved very powerful in the memory work of the participants. The enlarged images reconnected them with forgotten mental images of their relatives, and most importantly, these displayed images served as a means for intergenerational transmission of memories. *Faces of Loss* gave second and third generations a concrete image of their dead relatives which helped them better connect with their family’s past. It also provided second generation members with an opportunity to feel that they could play a role in preserving the memory of those relatives whom they had never met. The visual impact of the exhibition also evoked painful memories, mainly in Holocaust survivors; but at the same time, it facilitated a process of working through some of the feelings associated with their losses. These effects will be discussed in the next chapter. In exploiting the power of photographs, *Faces of Loss* constituted a powerful memorialization project for the participants, as it engaged the community of loss in processes of individual and collective remembering. The participants’ meaning-making about *Faces of Loss* was not limited to the memorial aspect; rather, the display of images prompted construction of other meanings and interpretations. In the next
chapter, I will examine those other meanings that participants drew from this exhibition. I refer to them as the “therapeutic” aspects.
“One of the goals of mounting this exhibition was to provide a space for survivors who carry an obligation to remember…” Roberta Kremer wrote in the Zachor Newsletter (Kremer, 1995). Although the curator had planned that the last exhibition she curated at the VHEC would be one that directly addressed the survivors and their families, she did not foresee the therapeutic impact that her project would have for the participants.

This chapter will focus on those therapeutic outcomes of *Faces of Loss*. Four themes will be discussed: establishing safety, disclosing and sharing losses, mourning, and engaging in a social action project through denouncing the perpetrators and educating the wider public. These themes constitute basic elements in Herman’s (1992) psychotherapeutic model for treating survivors of trauma. In her groundbreaking book, *Trauma and Recovery*, this author delineated a pathway of recovery for those who have experienced trauma. She states, “Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life.” (p.155) For Herman, core experiences in the recovery process are the empowerment and reconnection that enable survivors to transform their personal tragedy into a social action project. In a similar fashion, Kellermann (2001) delineated four phases in the psychotherapeutic treatment of Holocaust survivors: establishment of a safe and trusting relationship with survivors, encouraging survivors to
tell their personal story, mourning the multiple losses of the past, and transforming the traumatic past through activities such as commemoration and transmission of the Holocaust legacy to the next generations (p. 206).

*Faces of Loss* presented the participants with the therapeutic possibilities that could enable them to engage in a process similar to the trauma recovery pathway delineated by Herman. The exhibition provided the participants with a safe place where their private memories could be disclosed and eventually go public; it offered participants the opportunity to talk about their losses and mourn them individually and collectively; lastly, it gave them the opportunity to engage in a project aimed to denounce the atrocities committed by the Nazis to their relatives, and educate younger generations on the dangers posed by racism and bigotry. The discussion in this chapter is organized around the therapeutic elements in *Faces of Loss* stated above. Implicit in this discussion is the use of the memorial exhibition as an alternative, non-clinical setting for facilitating therapeutic processes in Holocaust survivors and their children.

**The VHEC as a “Safe Space”**

In transforming the VHEC into a physical space for remembering the local community’s perished relatives, the Centre’s staff also provided participants with a psychological space for enabling them to work through their losses. Mental health practitioners have long recognized the importance of providing survivors of trauma with a safe environment where they can disclose painful issues (Agger, 1990; Herman, 1992; Slochower, 1996). The physical space of the VHEC provided an emotional space where the participants felt safe enough to revisit painful memories. The participants’ perception
of VHEC as a psychological safe space can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the Centre was an initiative that had originated with the Holocaust child survivors. Moreover, contained within the space of the Jewish Community Centre (JCC), where many of the main Jewish organizations are located, it has become a gathering spot where many survivors conduct a significant number of their daily activities through their involvement in the diverse programs the JCC has to offer. In a sense, the Jewish Community Centre constitutes, for those who are actively involved in its diverse activities, a public space that in some ways is an extension of their private homes.

For many Holocaust survivors and child survivors, visiting the VHEC after a workout session, swimming, going to the library or just meeting socially with friends in the cafeteria, seemed a common activity since they were “already there” (at JCC). In that sense, the motivation for visiting the VHEC is social. In this regard, Heumann-Gurian (2006) argues that in addition to museums’ traditional definition as educational spaces, community museums demand a more inclusive definition that emphasizes their role as venues for providing communities with support and a space for engaging in social activities. She states that museums "provide a physical space to socialize with others, have a snack or meal, and keep warm or cool in inclement weather" (p.71). During my fieldwork at the VHEC, even before the exhibition was installed, survivors would just “pop in” and say “hi” to the staff. Very often, I would see a survivor in the curator’s office having a chat with her, dropping by to donate a book, or just checking out what was going on at the Centre. Moreover, being the site for the monthly meetings of survivors, child survivors and second generation, the VHEC is a space most participants of the exhibition were very familiar with. By providing activities and projects,
the VHEC became what Agger (1994) describes as “ritual space” (p. 4) where healing and “psychological transformation” (p. 4) could take place (Agger, 1994). Grubich-Simitis, cited in Schulberg (1997), in discussing trauma in Holocaust survivors and their families, noted the importance of providing these families with a safe place to be heard and validated (p. 325). It seemed that the level of comfort most participants experienced at the VHEC facilitated their bringing out private memories to the public sphere, since that transition occurred within a spatial setting that they perceived as “safe.” As a safe space, the VHEC proved to be a "container" sturdy enough to hold the participants as they disclosed painful information and emotions.

Talking About Losses

The therapeutic literature narrates how Holocaust survivors had to live in a self-imposed silence for many years, partly as a defense that enabled them to invest all their energy in building their new lives and providing for their children (Fossion, Rejas, Servias, Pelc, and Hirsch, 2003; Kellermann, 2001; Krell,1990; Shoshan,1989). Since Freud’s contribution on the value of disclosure, health practitioners have stressed the benefits that talking about their past can bring to Holocaust survivors (Danieli,1998; Hass,1990; Kellerman, 2001; Krell,1982, 1985; Mazor et. al.,1990). Nevertheless, Holocaust survivors seldom have the opportunity to talk about their losses; nor, as studies indicate, do they usually seek psychotherapy (Fogelman,1988; Krell,1982, Krystal,1984). While most studies on Holocaust survivors and their families emphasize the healing aspect of breaking this silence (Bar-On et. al.1998; Danieli, 1998; Krell, 1985; Schulberg, 1996; Fodorova, 2005), few studies provide suggestions on how to facilitate this process with survivors who do not seek help from a mental health
professional. *Faces of Loss* was planned in such a way that participating in it demanded that participants disclose their losses. Three key junctures during the lifespan of the exhibition provided participants with a context to talk about their perished relatives: the intake interview, the opening night, and the aftermath of the opening night. The following sections explore these three stages in relation to their therapeutic potential.

**The Intake Interviews**

Talking about the participants’ losses was part of the process of participating in this memorial exhibition. No submission of images for display could occur without some talk about the person who appeared in the photograph. The participants’ desire to memorialize their dead relatives had prompted them to bring their pictures to the Centre. Nevertheless, most of them did not expect that the intake interview would require more than just submission of their pictures for scanning. Some participants told me afterwards that when they first booked an appointment at the VHEC to have their pictures scanned, they did not think they would be embarking on such an emotional journey. A second generation participant remarked,

> I did not think anything about it [the exhibition] other than, “well, I will bring the pictures, what the heck”…and I never expected it to be so emotional…it first started when I spoke to you the first time around [during the intake interview].

She added that although she was aware of her family's history, she did not think of the Holocaust as a key issue in her identity and view of the world. For this participant, as is the case with many other children of survivors, there is an assumption that the Holocaust "was in the past and had no effect upon them – it happened to their parents" (Schulberg 1997, p. 325). However, their involvement with this project confronted them
with, what Shulberg (1997) describes, as their “unwanted inheritance” (p. 325) and a range of emotions they were not fully aware of or prepared to address.

The intake interviews provided an opportunity for children to ask their parents questions about the Holocaust that they had avoided asking “for fear of triggering painful memories” in their parents (Bar-On et al., 1998). Since the interview required participants to provide the interviewer with specific information about the dead relatives, it set the stage for breaking the “conspiracy of silence.” This experience was clearly illustrated in an intake interview I conducted. A woman booked a time to bring in her mother’s pictures for scanning. As I started going over the questions, the daughter told me that she could not answer any of them, first of all because she did not know the answers, and secondly because she needed her mother’s consent to disclose the information she knew. As she picked up her cellular phone to call her mother, she remarked that she was not expecting such questions. She called her mother and told her that I needed some information in order to include her family’s photographs in the exhibition. She proceeded to ask her mother the questions I was asking her. I could sense it was a very intense emotional process for both mother and daughter. By having to answer the intake questions, the mother and daughter began a dialogue on a topic that was not discussed at home. The intake interview established the context for raising questions that were tacitly discouraged in the deep-seated silence about this event. After the interview, the daughter stated, “We do not talk about this and actually this is the first time my mother has agreed to share her story with others that are not family members.”

Particularly striking was an intake interview with a couple who were both
Holocaust survivors. The mother had talked very little to the children about her experiences of this event. The father had never talked to anyone, except his wife, about his past. Both had refused to participate in any of the testimony projects available to them through the VHEC or the Shoah Foundation. Yet, both came to the intake interview to submit their pictures. The wife had a hard time responding to the information I was asking her. When it was the husband’s turn, he could not go beyond the initial questions regarding the names of his dead relatives without breaking into tears. It was then that his wife told me he had never disclosed his past to anyone other than her. He did manage to provide me with information about when and where his relatives died. Aware of the emotional turmoil this experience could trigger, I gave them the names of resources they could access in case they needed some follow-up after the interview. For the next weeks, I often thought about them, not knowing whether that intake interview had been the beginning of a healing process. However, weeks later I saw them at the opening ceremony of Faces of Loss. I wondered if they were now at the beginning of a healing journey, given that an initial barrier of silence had been broken during the intake interview. Attending the opening ceremony and participating in it presumably represented an important breakthrough for this couple who, until the time of this exhibition, had fully immersed themselves in a “conspiracy of silence.”

At the time participants made the decision to submit pictures for this exhibition, many did not perceive their involvement in this project in terms of a potential therapeutic benefit; however, there were a few who did foresee a therapeutic aspect in their participation. A second generation man, who had never before joined any second generation group remarked,
I jumped at the opportunity to be interviewed because I know that is how one heals, that is how I heal by talking, opening up things that I haven’t talked about before, so…maybe this [exhibition] will be healing.

He added that since this project was sponsored by the VHEC, it was “benign.” In a way, the Centre “legitimated” the experience of putting himself “out there.”

Participating in the VHEC’s project was an opportunity to heal by talking outside the traditional therapy context. In contrast to other memorial activities where participants are expected to engage in a collective ritual that does not involve any personal disclosure, this memorial project required them to verbalize their experience. The participants were “languaging” themselves “into the world” (Arvay 2002, p.117).

Arvay (2002) points out how language is “a living site where personal meaning is created…” (p.113). Taking Shotter’s (1993) notion of “third space”, Arvay suggests that therapeutic conversations are voiced into a space, a third space that occurs between counselors and clients where both have a role to play in a “joint construction of a shared reality” (p.117). The idea behind this notion is that language is a form of action and that in the process of disclosing and narrating their relatives’ stories, the participants engage themselves in new understandings or meaning-making activities. For those participants, who had never talked about their losses, that initial "languaging" occurred during the intake interview. Their involvement in the exhibition created opportunities to connect themselves with their pasts in a different way: For some, it was a cathartic experience, for others, it was the beginning of a conversation with their children; while for others it meant taking an active stance regarding their past.

Nevertheless, the intake interview was not a therapeutic experience for all
participants. For those not prepared or willing to deal with their past, the level of disclosure the initial questions required was seen as a threat. It needs to be noted that the benefits that the mental health literature usually associates with disclosure are very much related to the participants’ willingness to disclose.

Sharing Losses: The Opening Night

Once the exhibition was mounted in its major part, the curator planned to organize an opening evening. Aware of the psychological impact the exhibition was having on the participants, she decided to ask Ruth Sigal, a psychologist who was herself a child survivor, to plan the opening night in such a way that it would resonate emotionally with the community of loss. Having a background in psychology myself, I was invited to collaborate as well with the planning of the opening night. Ruth Sigal proposed that the occasion serve as an opportunity to encourage the participants in *Faces of Loss* to share their losses with each other and undergo a ritual of collective remembering and mourning. She stressed that “healing came along with sharing” and that the main objective of that memorial evening was to encourage people to talk about their dead relatives (R. Sigal, personal communication, Feb. 9 2005).

Ruth Sigal, Roberta Kremer, and I worked together in planning the program for the opening night, which included reciting the mourners’ prayer *Kaddish*, lighting candles in memory of the dead relatives, and singing *a cappella* a song that victims sang before entering the crematoriums. Due to the emotional nature of this event, the planners decided that the event had to be private, restricted only to the participants, their families, staff and board members. It was set for an afternoon on April 13, 2005 from 4:00 to 5:30 pm. An invitation for the opening night was sent out to all the
participants of the exhibition. The text read: “You are invited to attend a special Memorial Program honouring the memory of lost family members.” The text indicated place, time, time when Kaddish would be recited, and asked people to RSVP (see Appendix J).

Final arrangements were completed by noon of the day of the opening. By 3:30 pm participants began to arrive at the VHEC. In the next half hour, more than one hundred guests filled the VHEC space. First, second, third generation and fourth generation members as young as one year old were there to commemorate those people whose images were now displayed on the walls.

By the time the formal opening began, approximately 150 people were present. The curator’s opening remarks acknowledged the community’s involvement in the success of the exhibition and the importance of having engaged in a collaborative project; as she stated, “us with you” are keeping “alive” the memory of those beloved relatives who perished during the Holocaust. Remarks by Frieda Miller, the educational director of the VHEC, then highlighted the educational value of the exhibition, reading aloud some of the comments the students wrote. Ruth Sigal delivered the final remarks. She talked about the therapeutic value of the exhibition and shared with the audience the story of her sister who was killed during the Holocaust. Lacking a photograph of her sister, she showed an empty frame instead. This proved very powerful and moving to all of those present. Once the memorial rituals were over, she encouraged everyone to go back to their relatives’ images and talk about them with the other participants whose family images were displayed in the same area.

The memorial activities, which consisted in reciting Kaddish and lighting candles,
were powerful and set up the framework for motivating participants to share their stories among themselves. Most participants began by introducing their relatives to strangers, friends and family members. Age, gender and nationality were not impediments in this sharing activity. A mother carrying a young child in her arms told her: “this is grandma’s dad and mom.” I was particularly struck to see the couple who had never spoken about their past with anyone before, talking with a gentleman from the audience. I could not presume they were talking about their perished relatives; nevertheless, they were still present at this event aimed to mourn and remember their losses. By 5:45 pm, everyone had left. We, the organizers, had the impression that the opening night could not have gone better. However, it was not until I began my own research interviews that I realized the impact that evening had left on the community of loss.

My interviews confirmed that the activity planned by Ruth Sigal had succeeded in encouraging Holocaust survivors, child survivors and second generation to talk about their losses. A Holocaust survivor commented,

I think Ruth Sigal did a beautiful job. She showed us a blank frame because she did not have any pictures and that truly made an impression on me…then I found it very good talking to others. It was helpful because, you know, I never talk about it.

This type of comment was not limited to one participant. I heard them from a number of people whom I interviewed. The importance of engaging survivors in activities that enable them to talk about the losses of their past has been stressed by therapists that work with aging Holocaust survivors. Kahana, Harel and Kahana (1989), for example, make a specific reference to the importance that self-disclosure to friends
and family has for the aging survivors. Two second generation participant comments cited below clearly illustrate the therapeutic effects that this activity had for them,

That [opening evening] was totally incredible. I mean I really didn’t want to go, I had mixed feelings. I had asked my husband to come. He took time off from work, my daughter came from school. We spoke to a few people there, she [daughter] saw the pictures on the walls….. We said Kaddish, we spoke about them briefly, we walked around. If it hadn’t been for that event, I don’t think I would have come out of my way to (unclear phrase) to share them [losses] with anybody. The more that we can share, the healthier we will all be. All of it is good. It is good to think like that because I tend not to go to these events.

What was really important for me, for all of us, I think, was to show each other the photographs, to introduce to each other the rest of the family…we made this gesture together, and I think that was very good because it is all those things that bring people together, closer. So I think that was really a positive of this exhibition.

Although conversations with friends or people who also experienced the terrors of the Holocaust have proved beneficial for Holocaust survivors and second generation (Mazor et al., 1990), usually there is a dearth of social and physical settings to allow these conversations to take place. Faces of Loss provided Holocaust survivors and their families with the physical and psychological space for opening up a therapeutic dialogue in a non therapeutic setting. Indeed, the exhibition seemed to affirm Krell’s (1989) assertion that “working therapeutically with survivors requires departures from the usual
psychotherapeutic methods…” (p. 225).

From another perspective, the activities on the opening night presented the community of loss with an “interpretative grid” through which their trauma as a community was mediated at an emotional and cognitive level through the speeches and activities that took place that evening. Alexander (2004) elaborates that [such a] “grid has a supra-individual, cultural status, it is symbolically structured and sociologically determined” (p. 201).

The Aftermath of the Opening Night

Following the opening night, feedback to the curator about this event suggested that participants had found it easier to talk about the dead relatives. Faces of Loss acted as a “silence breaker” fracturing for some families the "conspiracy of silence." One survivor told the curator that he had never told his story to his children, but after the opening night, his children and even more so, his grandchildren, were asking him questions about his lost relatives (R. Kremer, personal communication, April 21, 2005).

The “‘introducing-my-relatives” activity which began during the opening night, was carried on throughout the exhibition and became a common practice among some participants. It enabled them to talk about their losses in a way that seemed more like a benign exercise aimed to “introduce” their relatives to the community, without having to personally narrate the painful way their beloved ones died. That information could be read by the viewer since it appeared in the caption. Participants had a choice on how to construct the narrative about their relatives. A child survivor told me,

I do not know what Roberta had in mind, but to me, you got people talking to each other. Most people are very private but in looking at the photos they would
say, “come and look at my grandfather” or “this is my sister” … people had the opportunity to share this with each other. I got people to come over and tell me, “come over and see my little sister,” I didn’t know they had a sister. She had no reason to tell me about it.

Without the structure provided by this exhibition, these “family introductions” would probably not have occurred. *Faces of Loss* provided the local community of loss with a framework that encouraged participants to talk openly about a topic that had been silenced for many years. The exhibition provided what Hoffman (2004) described as an “opportunity to address frontally what had been silenced” (p. xi). Throughout the months that followed, participants introduced their relatives to friends and acquaintances. Some participants would bring friends to the VHEC to have them “meet” their families. During my fieldwork, I observed that most of the conversations around the images were more geared towards remembering the lives of their relatives rather than their tragic deaths. A frequent conversation topic was focused on identifying resemblances between the dead relatives and the participants’ family. Through these encounters, the participants would bring their dead relatives into their current lives.

In contrast with previous paradigms of loss and grief which point out the need to sever bonds with the dead, the new literature on bereavement emphasizes the need to integrate the dead into the survivors’ lives, recognizing that there is a continuing bond between the dead and those still alive (Neimeyer, 2001, p. 3). Exemplifying this theme, *Faces of Loss* gave the survivors the space to integrate their losses into the wider social context of the local community of loss. Moreover, in line with Neimeyer’s arguments, the VHEC became the facilitative context that provided participants with the opportunity to
explore and elaborate their relationship with their perished relatives and bring them into their ongoing lives. With the images of their relatives displayed in the public space of the VHEC, talking about them and introducing them to others became a practice that proved therapeutic for many participants.

In each of the stages explored above, Faces of Loss served as a catalyzing force for self-disclosure among the participants. The benefits of disclosure of Holocaust experiences has been a focus of several studies (Krell, 1990; Mazor et. al., 1988; Pennebaker et al., 1989). However, as discussed previously, this disclosure does not occur easily. Outside a therapeutic setting, the community of loss encounters few opportunities to engage in this cathartic experience. Faces of Loss encouraged this disclosure at different points and provided a framework that encouraged the participants to talk about their losses.

In sum, Faces of Loss proved itself a powerful resource to help survivors talk about their losses. Due to its lengthy duration (6 months), the project allowed participants, particularly those who had more difficulty in opening themselves up, to observe peers engage in that practice, and this played a pivotal role in normalizing the experience of talking about a previously taboo topic.

**Mourning**

In conjunction with the act of talking about the losses, a mourning process was taking place throughout the stages of the exhibition. The scholarship on Holocaust survivors, child survivors, and their children points out the difficulties of engaging in the mourning process as well as the need to experience it (Hass, 1990, 1995; Fodorova, 2005; Mazor et al., 1998). Faces of Loss provided participants with a non-therapeutic
setting to help Holocaust survivors both talk about their losses and mourn them. The use of museums spaces for facilitating mourning practices has been noted in the literature (Hass, 1995; Huyssen, 1994; LaCapra, 1998; Lentin, 2004). As such, Holocaust museums have become gathering places where public ceremonies and shared remembrance can take place. La Capra (1998) observed how museums as memorial sites make a collective mourning process possible, and stated how these museums could be seen as “lieux de deuil” (mourning sites) (p. 44).

While the VHEC shares some of those general features of national Holocaust museums such as providing a venue for collective remembering and mourning, as a local museum it provided the community with a very particular feature: it became a venue where the personal losses of the local community would be remembered and mourned; in doing so, it facilitated mourning processes which, according to the literature, have been inhibited in many survivors of the Holocaust (Bar On et al., 1998; Hass, 1995; Kellerman, 2001; Shoshan, 1989).

Two aspects of *Faces of Loss* proved central for easing these processes in the participants. First, as a symbolic cemetery it provided participants with a physical site devoted exclusively to remember and mourn their lost relatives; second, by organizing the opening night it encouraged the community of loss to participate in collective mourning rituals. These two aspects will be discussed in the following sections.

**Faces of Loss as a Cemetery**

The literature points out that in the absence of tombstones, museums can serve as “symbolic tombstones” (Stier 2003) for the victims of the Holocaust, and therefore, as mourning sites (Hass, 1995; Huyssen, 1994; LaCapra, 1998; Lentin, 2004). In the case
of *Faces of Loss*, the cemetery quality of the museum space was greatly enhanced by the presence of the lost relatives’ images. By exhibiting those precious images, the VHEC became a symbolic cemetery. Looking at these images, one child survivor remarked, “This [exhibition] feels like a cemetery, a place where something of them is left, it is a place to reflect, it evokes a sense of loss.” Another woman, whose mother was an Auschwitz survivor commented,

> You should include this Jewish prayer line, ‘May his/her soul be bounded with the soul of the living’…this is inscribed in every Jewish tombstone, and this is like a cemetery for these people who lack graves.

For some participants, seeing the images of their relatives displayed along with hundred of others, with a memorial candle lit continuously, gave them the feeling that they were in a cemetery more than in a museum. A child survivor upon seeing the exhibition for the first time exclaimed, “Each person died alone but now their souls are mingled together!”

In discussing Jewish funeral rites, Wahlhaus (2005) noted that a physical marker for the deceased represents a "symbol to relate to and something to visit" (p. 104). However, Holocaust survivors had to mourn their losses with the feeling that there was nothing left of their beloved ones. Terry (1984) stressed how the lack of identifiable burial places interfered with the survivors’ mourning process (p.147). Imbuing *Faces of Loss* with a funereal meaning reflected the participants’ unfulfilled wish of having a public physical space that could connect them symbolically to their dead relatives.

As the display space of the VHEC became filled with images of victims, it made the sense of loss more concrete and gave the participants a physical space for
connecting with memories and feelings associated with their dead relatives. However, this was more than a cemetery ground since the participants actually saw the images of their relatives. One participant stressed the importance of images, “When you go to the cemetery you look only at their names. There [VHEC] you saw the faces. It was as if they were alive. They looked at me too, you know…”

Unlike other projects aimed to remember and mourn lost relatives such as the Holocaust memorial at the Schara Tzedeck cemetery, *Faces of Loss*, through displaying the images, brought into the museum space the presence of the dead. The images had the power to engage the viewers emotionally in a way other mediums could not. This emotional engagement with the displayed images instigated an “ongoing dialogue with the dead” central in the work of mourning (Kaplan, 1996, p. 22).

By emerging in such a powerful way in the public arena, the relatives “came back to life” for many participants. Thus many participants revealed in their interviews how the exhibition had made them feel more connected with their dead relatives, “They became alive by being there [at the VHEC], it is like a concretization or affirmation of their existence.” “This is the most powerful exhibition we have had here…it brings the dead back to life.”

This exhibition is *la crème de la crème*, it has touched each one of us a great deal. I submitted my priceless pictures and it gives me a tremendous feeling to have them here. It has been like bringing the family back. In the cemetery it is only their names, but here, I have the feeling they are here.

The above comments, all of them given by Holocaust survivors, illustrate the exhibition’s power in re-establishing a connection with the lost objects. In the past, this
attachment to their dead relatives would have been described by grief therapists as a “pathological response”. However, in recent years, the paradigm of mourning, as a clearly “predictable emotional trajectory” (Neimeyer, 2001, p. 3), has given way to a new model of mourning. Hagman (2001) explains that mourning does not mean a relinquishment of the bonds with the dead, but “an exploration of the continuing value of the attachment” (p. 25) to the survivor and the preservation of the survivor’s attachment to the lost objects within the context of his/her ongoing life (Hagman, 2001). In the same vein, Klass (2001) emphasizes that the goal of grief is not to sever bonds with the dead but to integrate them into the survivors’ lives and social networks in a different way (p. 77). The singularity of the new paradigm is that there is not an “expectable endpoint to mourning” and therefore, “a person may mourn for a lifetime” (Hagman, 2001, p. 24).

The images of *Faces of Loss* stood as “visible evidence” that these relatives once existed. Their visual presence enabled survivors to sustain a bond with their dead relatives and helped the second generation to establish a connection with dead relatives whom they never met but whose presence had been felt all along. Through looking at the images of relatives, the members of the community of loss were faced not an abstract monument nor a name engraved in stone, but “traces” (Berger, 1980; Sontag, 1977) of their dead relatives embedded in the images displayed before their eyes. The piercing power of the images, in many instances, enabled the Holocaust survivors and their children to experience a closer connection with their deceased relatives, and elicited a process of mourning.

**Engaging in Collective Mourning Rituals**

Through bringing the participants together to perform mourning rituals at the
opening night, the organizers of the event provided the participants of *Faces of Loss* with a psychological, social and physical space to engage in a mourning process. Through the rituals performed at the opening night, the Holocaust survivors, child survivors, second and third generation were able to engage together in these rituals, along with the other members of the community of loss, which facilitated their collective mourning. The importance of having the opportunity to mourn their losses was poignantly described by a second generation woman,

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One of the tasks for my generation, for the children of Holocaust survivors is to mourn the loss…that loss that they were not able to mourn because it was just impossible for them, to deal with the pain of that loss and not be devastated by it….this needs a lot of mourning.
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In discussing mourning, Hagman (2001) notes, “the work of mourning is rarely done in isolation and may involve active engagement with fellow mourners and other survivors” (p.24). This author highlights the fundamentally interpersonal nature of the mourning process stressing the importance of the social milieu in facilitating it. Hagman claims, “many problems arising from bereavement are due to the failure of other survivors to engage with the bereaved person in mourning together” (p. 25). Similarly, Durkheim, much earlier (1915), emphasized that the coming together of individuals during mourning ceremonies provides them with a sensation of comfort since in weeping together, “they hold to one another, and the group is not weakened” (as cited in Alpert, 1965, p. 140).

Some participants’ comments illustrate the healing value of the collective mourning rituals performed at the opening ceremony, “I think it was very good we had
one afternoon of remembrance, we lighted candles and said *Kaddish*, and I think it was so good that all of us were together “(Holocaust survivor). “I found it quite good and that part was healing, you know, I did find it healing. The fact that we said *Kaddish*...that in itself was therapeutic “ (second generation). “You see a crowd of people, all crying for their families….there you saw all the families…that is why it was important…we all grieved together” (member of the broader community of loss).

Unlike mourning practices performed in either Holocaust museums or Holocaust memorials located at cemeteries, the exhibition *Faces of Loss* contributed in a very unique way to the “community of loss” mourning processes. Two main aspects contributed to this difference. First of all, unlike other Holocaust museums’ mourning rituals, the VHEC by organizing an opening night ceremony, invited participants to engage in mourning rituals that were specifically addressed to their relatives. This differed significantly from the mourning rituals performed at Holocaust museums where the prayer for the dead, *Kaddish*, is recited to address all those who perished during the Holocaust. Secondly, the mourning rituals were performed in the presence of visual images of the lost relatives. These images were more than an homage to their dead relatives, they were actually “an extension” of them, “a surrogate possession of [their] cherished person” (Sontag, 1977, p.155). The displayed images enabled participants to feel more connected with dead relatives and engage in a mourning process characterized by the preservation of their attachment with their lost objects.

**Engaging in a Social Action Project**

Herman (1992) describes the process by which some survivors of trauma transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by engaging in a constructive project in
the wider world. When survivors of trauma engage in social action projects, they feel empowered and reconnected, and these are “core experiences of recovery” (Herman, 1992, p. 197). Herman notes that these survivors discover that one way to transcend their personal misfortune is by “making it a gift to others” (p. 207). The following section focuses on those survivors whose participation in the exhibition was in response to what they perceived to be a call to social action. Herman notes that social action projects can take many forms but “public truth telling is the common denominator” (p. 208).

Three main themes emerged among those survivors whose engagement with *Faces of Loss* was motivated by a sense of social action: as educational, as a means of making viewers bear witness to the victims of the Holocaust, and as an indisputable proof thwarting Holocaust deniers. An effort to raise public awareness of the Holocaust is the common denominator in these three themes.

*Faces of Loss* as an Educational Initiative

*Faces of Loss* provided aging survivors with a further opportunity to participate in a meaningful educational project. Since the mid 1970’s, Holocaust survivors have been involved in public education initiatives in order to teach students and teachers about the events and implications of the Holocaust. According to Herman, educational initiatives where survivors take it upon themselves to “speak about the unspeakable in public in the belief that this will help others” has a therapeutic value since, “the trauma is redeemed when it becomes the source of the survivor’s mission” (p. 207). Although many participants experienced *Faces of Loss* mainly as a therapeutic project, and were aware of the therapeutic value of the diverse activities organized around the project, such as the initial interview and the commemorative evening, others articulated the
value of this exhibition simply in terms of its educational mandate. Following Herman’s approach, it can be suggested that even for those participants engaged solely in the educational aspect, *Faces of Loss* had a therapeutic impact as well, a consequence of their efforts to educate viewers on the Holocaust.

Robert Krell, a pioneer in involving survivors in educational activities, stressed the healing and therapeutic impact that Holocaust education projects had for the participating survivors. As the initiator of the testimony project with Holocaust survivors in Vancouver, he states,

> It was clear that involving survivors in educational activities had far greater potential for healing than traditional therapy, not that everyone was in need of therapy. But every Holocaust survivor was in need of healing, of accommodating to the trauma and learning to live alongside it (Krell, 2007).

Indeed, Frieda Miller envisioned the VHEC exhibition as an educational project which had as its aim to “put a face and a name to an unimaginable number like six million… It helps humanize a statistic” (Miller, 2005). For many participants, the motivation for participating in the exhibition was aligned with Frieda Miller’s goal. For them, participating in the exhibition was mainly motivated by the desire to educate viewers on the Holocaust. By bringing into the public space their very private relatives’ pictures, the participants engaged in a project dedicated to raise public awareness that the persons who were murdered were not numbers but people who had lost their lives. *Faces of Loss* encouraged participants to “transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis of social action” (Herman, 1992, p. 207).

In discussing trauma, Herman (1992) states that some survivors of trauma “feel
called upon to engage in the wider world” (p. 207). This author adds that when survivors recognize the wider dimension of their personal tragedy, they discover that they can use their personal experience to engage in projects for social action. The educational aspect was a theme that appeared frequently in the participants’ comments:

One child survivor commented,

> It [the exhibition] teaches them [students] to be accountable. It teaches them that they are not in fact powerless against prejudice and bigotry and anti-Semitism and anti whatever else they may be. That they can act too. That they can speak out against it in their own little corner of the world so that we will have or we do have some hope in a more equitable society looking at the young generation, being taught these things.

In the same vein, another child survivor remarked,

> This [exhibition] gave a unique opportunity to survivors, second generations and general public, because members of the public saw this exhibition and saw people who lived, loved and died…here they see a face that connects them much more with what happened. A picture is worth a thousand words. I think there is an enormous value there.

A child survivor emphasized,

> This exhibition is….its primary purpose, for me, is not for us who contributed with the photographs, it is for the public. This is its educational part, the main impact is for the public, particularly for the students who can begin to have a gut understanding of what it [the Holocaust] was.

Notably, these comments focus on the educative and public enlightenment
benefits of the exhibition, not on personal loss grievances. Herman (1992) argues that when survivors turn their trauma story into a legacy for the next generation, they feel that they are taking action to prevent the repetition of what they went through (p. 206). This theme of educating the next generations on the horrors of the Holocaust was repeated for many participants. Embracing the belief about Holocaust education as an antidote against genocide allowed survivors to embark on a cause greater than their own personal tragedy.

As has been mentioned, Holocaust survivors and child survivors have been involved in diverse educational initiatives in the past, such as testimony projects. While many survivors participated in the testimony project by the Shoah Foundation or the one organized by the VHEC, those initiatives took place more than twenty years ago. Despite the involvement of some survivors in educational initiatives for high school students, this has not been the pattern for the majority of survivors. Moreover, many of those who had a history of active participation in outreach education, have not been teaching about the Holocaust in recent years mainly because of aging and related health issues. For survivors who have to face the daily challenges of aging, *Faces of Loss* allowed them to take an active stance in an educational initiative that did not overtax their physical or emotional capacities. The exhibition engaged them in a project which allowed them to feel empowered since they were making a useful contribution. Krell (1990) claims that engaging survivors in Holocaust education is the “most healing therapeutic maneuver of all” (p. 20).

**Expanding the Circle of Witnesses: The Viewers Bear Witness**

Participating in a social action project proved to be a very intense emotional
experience for some participants. In having the images of their relatives displayed publicly, participants wanted viewers to bear witness to their relatives’ deaths. *Faces of Loss* not only educated the viewers about the Holocaust, but it was the medium to get the wider community to acknowledge the sorrow of their losses and to reach what Felman and Laub (1992) describe as a “testimonial resolution” (xvii). This refers to the process by which the narrator and the listener, despite inhibitions on both sides, engage in a common struggle to allow the telling of the trauma to proceed, and in this way allow the untold story to emerge.

The process of getting the viewers to bear witness to their losses acquired a restorative power similar to giving testimony. Despite the fact that *Faces of Loss* did not constitute a life testimony project, this exhibition became for some participants a non-textual, visual medium to tell the viewers about their trauma. *Faces of Loss*, therefore, provided the participants with a therapeutic and healing experience associated with giving testimony (Agger & Jensen 1990; Felman 1992; Herman 1992). While some participants described their participation in *Faces of Loss* in terms of a willingness to educate younger generations, for some others this educational goal had an impact at a very personal and emotional level. The educational rationale for participating in this project was accompanied by a very personal reference, “this is what happened to my family” and “this is what I carry with me.”

After describing what happened to her father in Auschwitz, a woman who was a Holocaust survivor stated,

> It [the exhibition] is the only satisfaction one has for your pain, the satisfaction is to know that future generations will know about it and it will set an example for
the future generations so it will not happen again. So that is why it is important to have those pictures of my family out there [at the VHEC] so that people will look at them.

This statement reflects the use of the public space to make a public statement, akin to a testimonial, about the injustice perpetrated against her family. Agger and Jensen (1990) noted that the word “testimony” has a double connotation, a public one: objective, judicial or political, and a subjective one, referring to the private and cathartic (p. 116).

Another woman, who was also a Holocaust survivor, explained that despite how painful the intake interview had been for her, she thought it was important to have those pictures displayed,

It is important because hopefully people who are members and not members of the Jewish community will be able to relate to people who are Holocaust survivors. I am hoping that by looking at the photos… they will understand, I am hoping, what we survivors have to carry with us.

One intake interviewee, put it starkly. "This is what I had, this is what I lost…I want students to learn that."

Like first-hand witness accounts, the participants of Faces of Loss were aware that they would have hundreds of viewers, mainly students, to bear witness to their losses. Herman highlights the role of having a “listening community” (p. 70) to the healing process. In a similar vein, Margalit (2002), describes how important it is for the moral witness to have a moral community that will listen to their testimony (p.155). Faces of Loss enabled participants to share their trauma to a “listening community” of
students who bore witness to their losses. The participants, as moral witnesses, who "witnessed the combination of the evil and the suffering" (Margalit, p.148) had, in the students visiting *Faces of Loss*, the moral community that allowed them to fulfill their mission to "live in order to serve" (p.154).

Felman and Laub (1992) reflect that in bearing witness, the survivors “speak for others to others” (p. 3). *Faces of Loss* became the venue for participants to engage in a project of telling the viewers what happened to their beloved ones and in doing so, enabled viewers to become co-owners of that story (p. 57). The community of loss sometimes had the opportunity to witness how the students bore witness to their losses if they happened to drop by at the VHEC during student group tours. On a couple of occasions, while observing school groups tour the exhibition, Holocaust survivors who were at the VHEC looking at their family images, interacted with the students. One time, when a couple of students were staring at a participant’s younger sister, the participant spontaneously informed the students that,

That little girl that you are staring at was my sister…she was being hidden by a family but one neighbor informed the Gestapo about her and she was taken away. I never saw her again.

Having the images up in the exhibition was a way to address others, to invite others to bear witness. Felman (1992) noted that to testify is more than simply reporting a fact or relating an experience, it is meant “to address another”, “to appeal to a community”, “to impress upon a listener, committing to oneself and others “the truth of an occurrence” (p. 204). Many survivors mentioned to me that despite the importance to them of sharing their testimonies with students, this task required an enormous
emotional effort. Some had done it in the past but had quit after some time because of the toll it took on them. Others explained they had never become an outreach speaker because of the time it required, or because they felt it would be too hard on them. However, they still had a powerful need to have a “listening community” that bore witness to their family’s tragedy. In order to connect the participants with the viewers of the exhibition, Frieda Miller created a visitors’ book, with students’ comments. When there were specific comments about a participants’ family, she would be sure to have the participants read them when they visited the VHEC. Reading the students’ comments connected the members of the community of loss to the students who bore witness to their losses.

**Taking Action Against Holocaust Deniers**

Since the resurgence of anti-Semitic and Neo-Nazi groups in Canada, which began in the sixties, some Holocaust survivors have been at the forefront in the efforts to take action against these hate-mongers (Bialystock, 2000, p. 97). In the mid-1970’s, many Holocaust survivors, who had been silent about their experiences, decided that they had to speak publicly about them (Bialystock, 2000, p.178). Talking about their experiences was seen by many survivors as their way of taking action against those who questioned or minimized the Holocaust. For these participants, the VHEC, through *Faces of Loss*, became a political forum to respond to and counterattack those claims that denied the existence of the Holocaust. Therefore, participating in *Faces of Loss* was mainly about responding to a pressing social and political demand and to fulfill their “survivors' mission” (Herman 1992, p.207) of preventing the truth of the Holocaust from being undermined. The following interview extracts illustrate the participants’
engagement in *Faces of Loss* as a social action project intended to counteract the outrageous claims of Holocaust deniers.

One survivor commented,

> People come up and say, “this [Holocaust] never happened”, but here [at the exhibition] there is a proof, the pictures of parents, children, show viewers that these people existed and were murdered in a very brutal way.

Another participant, a Holocaust survivor in his nineties, expressed his concern about Holocaust deniers. He explained to me that he was “quite private” and that at first he hesitated about submitting his pictures to be scanned since those pictures “had no meaning to other people”, but then he changed his mind when he realized that having those images displayed was his personal contribution towards confirming the veracity of the Holocaust.

> So then I saw a reason why [to submit] because I am an eyewitness and these pictures are witnesses too…I am afraid that maybe in fifty years when there will not be anybody around anymore who was at the camps, this [the Holocaust] will only be a drop in history so there is the importance that we maintain as a force. There are many people who want to deny the event, so at least they see pictures with a purpose of being there… they are impersonal, they have no relation to them [viewers] but they witness those faces [displayed images].

Along the same lines, a second generation man expressed that, by having all those pictures up, the Holocaust cannot be denied. He averred,

> It is not deniable, no one can say it did not happen….students who come will remember this…and take that memory with them and maybe they will do what
they can to fight racism, bigotry and hatred.

Herman stresses that “social action can take many forms, from concrete engagements with particular individuals to abstract intellectual pursuits” (p. 208). *Faces of Loss* provided participants with the opportunity to engage in a social action project within the demands of their daily lives and the limits of their capacities. This was especially relevant for the aging Holocaust survivors, who felt the resulting empowerment of contributing to a personally meaningful cause without having to bear the more strenuous demands of other Holocaust education projects such as speaking engagements with student groups.

To summarize, this chapter explored the therapeutic implications of mounting a memorial exhibition with the photographic images of the local community’s deceased relatives. In analyzing the results, three main themes emerged: the exhibition as a means for disclosing and sharing losses, for facilitating mourning, and for engaging participants in social action. These main themes, which characterized the therapeutic aspects of this project, were organized around Herman’s proposed pathway of recovery for trauma survivors.

Participation in *Faces of Loss* enabled many participants to break their long silence about the Holocaust and begin talking about their painful losses. The intake interviews were the start of that process for some of them. The activities of the opening night, which invited participants to share among themselves their losses, provided the framework for further disclosure. Talking about their dead relatives became a common practice among some Holocaust survivors and their children when visiting the exhibition. For the second generation participants, this exhibition served as a catalyst for breaking
the “conspiracy of silence” since the act of submitting photographs for the exhibition prompted these children of survivors to ask questions they had long avoided, sensing that these questions was tacitly discouraged in their homes. The visual nature of the exhibition was crucial in facilitating the therapeutic processes that many participants experienced. The blown up images of their relatives faces created the feeling that the relatives had come “back to life”, allowing Holocaust survivors to experience a feeling of connection and reconnection with those perished relatives. The feeling aroused in the participants by the visual “presence” of their deceased relatives, in conjunction with the activities organized around the exhibition, facilitated individual and collective mourning. However, despite the cathartic and grieving processes that the exhibition triggered in many participants, for some others, the therapeutic aspect of the exhibition derived mainly from the benefits they experienced through their participation in an educational initiative aimed to teach students and other viewers about the horrors of the Holocaust. The display of the photographic images of their dead relatives gave incontrovertible proof of what the Nazis had done to their beloved ones. *Faces of Loss* enabled participants to provide viewers with a visual testimony of their losses, educate the younger generations on the Holocaust, and take action against Holocaust deniers’ claims that denied or downplayed this event.

The findings revealed in this chapter suggest that an exhibition of this kind can prove very beneficial for participants by facilitating the process of working through the experience of loss. These benefits were somehow corroborated five years later, when I conducted the peer review and member check to re-assess the results of the study.
Peer Review

As described in the Methodology chapter, I met with two mental health experts, who were child survivors themselves and had participated in the exhibition, to conduct the peer review check. I discussed the main findings of this study and asked them the following questions:

Do my findings resonate with your experience of the exhibition?

What to you believe is the value of these findings?

The peer review comments were mainly focused on the therapeutic implications of my findings. Both respondents reported that my interpretation was in general accurate since it resonated with their own observations about the exhibition. The value one of the child survivors saw in this research project was that it provided another “piece to the puzzle” on how to bring first and second generation together in dealing with the Holocaust experience. The other child survivor commented mainly on the value of the exhibition as a space for helping Holocaust survivors and their children talk about the Holocaust. She felt that the principal value of this research lay in its documentation of the project, which might then be emulated by other Holocaust centres.

Member Check

As described in the methodology chapter, for conducting the member check I sent a letter to all the interview participants from my research (Appendix H) and asked them if they would like to meet and discuss the results with me. Three Holocaust survivors, two child survivors and three second generation participants responded to my letter. I shared the findings with them and asked them the same two basic questions:

Do my findings resonate with your experience of the exhibition?
What to you believe is the value of these findings?

For these participants, the interpretation of the findings resonated with their own experience. One Holocaust survivor commented that the value of the exhibition was that it made her parents “visible for others” and that the value of the exhibition was in “bringing them [dead relatives] back to you”. Another Holocaust survivor commented that the finding that resonated most with her personal experience of the exhibition was in the satisfaction it gave her that her dead relatives would be remembered by the wider community. A child survivor commented that an important outcome of the research project is that it highlighted the role of community centres and museums as powerful resources for the community. In the same vein, a second generation man commented that when I first interviewed him, he thought that my research was “too academic,” but my findings it now seemed, had a “practical value” that he had not appreciated before. He stated that this value was mainly in the function local community centres could have for the community of Holocaust survivors and second generation. Moreover, he acknowledged that mounting exhibitions that resonated directly with the local community’s Holocaust experience had a distinct therapeutic value. Another second generation man commented that the findings that most reflected his own experience were about *Faces of Loss* as a project that enabled participants to talk about their losses. For him, “The exhibition experience made me realize that I could go public.” He thought that the value of my research would be in having other communities that had also been victimized in the past, take up similar initiatives.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I examined the meanings of bringing private losses into the public arena through a museum exhibition based exclusively on digitalized images of the vanished. This chapter focuses on the discussion of my findings and its implications. I situate the discussion around the significance of the main areas that are related to the findings: the memorial aspect of the exhibition and the therapeutic aspect. I proceed with discussing the practical implications of these findings in various fields, as well as the significance of these findings for future research. I include some reflections on my personal journey that resulted from having conducted this research, and I finish by noting the limitations of the study and drawing final conclusions.

Woven into the discussion of the findings is the encounter of the participants with the photographic images displayed in *Faces of Loss* and the centrality of the images as vehicles for facilitating the memory work and therapeutic processes in the participants.

The Memorial Aspect of *Faces of Loss*

In this section, I will discuss the implications of this investigation as a memory project. I will focus on its significance in three main areas: 1. VHEC as museum and memorial, 2. the shaping of individual and collective memories and 3. the intergenerational transmission of memories.

**VHEC as “House of Memory” and Memorial**

The literature on Holocaust museums stresses the dual function of these institutions as museums and memorials (Linenthal, 1995; Patraka, 1996; Young, 1994;
Wollasten, 2005). This study confirms the concurrent function that the VHEC acquired in mounting *Faces of Loss*. It became the site where the memory of the dead relatives was institutionalized and preserved, and it also provided the participants with a memorial space for engaging them in a process of memory work and remembrance.

Museums, as legitimizing institutions, affirm the value of the collected objects since, as Crane (2000) posits, “being collected means being valued and remembered institutionally” (p. 3). As the photographic images became part of the VHEC’s space, they acquired permanence and became “fixed” (Crane, p.3) in the memory of the museum. With the preservation of the images in the museum, the private memories became institutionalized, and placed in what Stier (2003) aptly describes as the “the family crypt of the museum” (p. 114). This study confirms the role that Holocaust museums can play in institutionalizing Holocaust memory and indicates new ways in which local Holocaust museums can function as sites of memory for the local community, helping its members to perpetuate the memory of their dead relatives. Furthermore, it provides empirical evidence of a project intent on turning a local Holocaust centre into the community’s memory storehouse.

The prominent role of institutions in perpetuating the Holocaust memory as the population of Holocaust survivors diminishes every day, has been noted in the literature (Kusno, 1997). Although national museums perform an important role as custodians of Holocaust memory (Young, 1993), this study provides evidence that local Holocaust museums could be more responsive to the local Holocaust survivors’ need to have what Linenthal (1995) described as a “house of memory” (p. 256). However, since local Holocaust museums are mainly focused on their education programs, they have not
engaged in projects aimed to preserve the memories of the local community members at large. Initiatives that local Holocaust museums have undertaken, such as testimony recollections, have been directed specifically towards Holocaust and child survivors; this specific group has, therefore, had the opportunity to institutionalize its memories in a museum’s physical space. This testimonial collection constitutes a common practice in local Holocaust museums and education centres in Canada and the United States (Holocaust Centre of Northern California, Illinois Holocaust and Education Center, Holocaust Centre of Toronto, Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, Holocaust Education Centre in Winnipeg among others). Other memories stored in the museums’ archives are those belonging to aging Holocaust and child survivors who have spontaneously brought their memorabilia, specifically photographs, to be archived in the museum. However, the experience with *Faces of Loss* suggests that members of the broader community of loss, that includes all those members from the local Jewish community who lost relatives during the Holocaust, can use their local museums as “houses of memory.”

This study documents the role of a local museum in facilitating remembrance practices in their community members and highlights the salience of the “symbolic tombstone” (Stier, 2003) function of Holocaust museums. The display of the photographic images of their dead relatives in the museum space engaged the participants of *Faces of Loss* in a powerful form of personalized remembrance where the images displayed resonated directly with each one of them. These findings, therefore, call for the use of pre-Holocaust images in local museums as memorial spaces and powerful media to engage the community of loss in remembrance practices.
and mourning processes.

Furthermore, this study illustrates how local museums can function as permanent memorial spaces. By creating an online version of *Faces of Loss* after the dismounting of the images, VHEC provided the community with an ongoing memorial exhibition through the Internet virtual *Faces of Loss*. The online version of the exhibition enabled participants to continue with the memory work that first started with the creation of the exhibition. Moreover, the virtual exhibition, lacking the physical restrictions of the original exhibition, was able to incorporate more photographic images, which consisted mainly of those late submissions. Most importantly, this online exhibition was the medium for institutionalizing and bringing into view what one participant reverently described as the “hall of honoured persons,” – the names of those who perished without leaving the physical trace of a photograph. The Internet based *Faces of Loss* thus provided the broader community of loss with the inclusiveness that the physical project did not achieve. This study, then, throws light on novel ways in which local museums can fulfill the need of the local community to remember and honour their dead relatives through innovative utilization of physical and cybernetic space.

**Shaping Holocaust Memory in the “Community of Loss”**

Museums, as cultural institutions, are not limited to the task of acting as storehouses of memory but are actively engaged in creating new forms of knowledge and shaping new memories (Crane, 2000, p. 9). The findings of this study support the existing scholarship on the centrality of cultural institutions and remembrance practices in shaping Holocaust memory (Friedlander, 1994; Huyssen, 2003; Linenthal, 1995; Young, 1993). However, the present investigation examines the impact of an exhibition
based exclusively on concrete visual images on the community of loss’ memory work. In discussing the impact of the visual on collective memory, Zelizer (1998) stresses the gaps in our knowledge about how images function as vehicles of collective memory (p. 2). This investigation provides empirical evidence on the link between visual images and memory work.

The shaping of memories occurred at two levels: individual and collective. At an individual level, the digitally scanned images reconnected survivors with visual memories that were long ago forgotten and it also created new memories for the participants. In many cases, the images participants saw displayed did not correspond to the mental pictures they had about their relatives which were mainly based on the photographs in their possession. The use of digital technology transformed these images. It made small, blurry faces emerge as almost natural size headshots. By seeing the details of their relatives’ faces, the participants internalized new images of their dead relatives and created new memories about them.

This study also contributes to the existing literature on collective memory as it provides empirical evidence on the role of cultural institutions in the production, shaping and proliferation of individual and collective memory, highlighting the process by which individual memories can be transformed into collective or cultural memory. *Faces of Loss* provided a social framework for engaging the participants in remembering processes prompted by the photographic images. *Faces of Loss* shaped the collective memory of the community by integrating the various different individual memories of the participants into a common visual experience that gave the participants a sense of collectivity. Zerubavel (1997), in discussing collective memory, argues that the collective
memory of a group is “quite different from the sum total of the personal recollections of its various individual members” (p. 96).

With the participants’ self-regard linked to their relationship to the collection of images displayed, *Faces of Loss* became what Durkheim (1895) described as a “collective representation.” For Durkheim, collective representations are greater than the sum of individual representations. In essence, the “emergent result transcends each individual mind, as the whole transcends the part” (as cited in Pierce, 1960, p. 162).

In the case of *Faces of Loss*, the public display of the other participants’ losses resonated at a very personal level with the members of the local community as it tapped into their individual memories, and also encouraged them to think about their personal losses in relationship with the local community’s losses. *Faces of Loss*, as a collective representation, transcended their individual losses and reminded the bereaved that they were part of a larger entity: the community of loss. In this way, the participants were linked by a common representation that facilitated their interactions since they were all connected by that visual mosaic. By looking at hundreds of photographic images of faces, the participants were confronted with a visual representation of their loss as a community. Through the participants’ encounter with this collective representation, their individual memories were etched into a larger phenomenon: the community of loss’ collective memory.

**Intergenerational Transmission of Memory**

This study also provides empirical evidence of the pivotal role pre-Holocaust photographs can play in passing memories from one generation to the other. Much has been written on the power of photographs and how they constitute, in Hirsch’s words,
the “family’s primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation - the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated” (Hirsch, 1997, pp. 6-7). However, there is a lack of empirical research to support these arguments. This study responds to this gap in the scholarly work and throws light on the use of museums as a vehicle for facilitating the intergenerational transmission of memories.

For those aging Holocaust survivors and child survivors who felt pressured to pass their family’s Holocaust legacy on to their children before they died, *Faces of Loss* facilitated that process by creating a context that connected the past with the present. Participating in the exhibition was seen by many of the participants as a way to transmit the memory of the dead parents and relatives to their children. The exhibition was particularly important as a memory project for the second and third generation. As Hirsch (2001) noted, the children of survivors have inherited a Holocaust memory from their parents that has been mediated through “representation, projection, and creation - often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible…” (p. 9). Having had to wrestle throughout their lives with shadows and their parents’ fragmented narratives of an event that was beyond their imagination, *Faces of Loss* provided second and third generation children with a more solid visual memory of their deceased relatives. With a material image to facilitate intergenerational identification, children and grandchildren were able to relate to their deceased family relatives in new ways.

This study, then, provides evidence of the role of museums in engaging second and third generations in “postmemory” work. It illustrates how museums can provide new contexts for visual images previously confined to the private world and, in so doing,
enable the “postmemorial working through” (Hirsch, 2001, p. 29) to occur. Much of the literature on second generation discusses the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Bar On 1993; Danieli, 1995; Hass 1990; Fodorova, 2005). This poses the question of whether non-traumatic memories can be passed on to the second generation. This study indicates that local museums can contribute to the creation of new forms of intergenerational identification and connections with the past that include non-traumatic memories.

The Therapeutic Aspect of *Faces of Loss: Using Cultural Spaces for Individual and Social Healing*

The findings of this study support the arguments stated in the literature on the use of Holocaust museums as sites of mourning (Hass, 1995; Huyssen, 1994; La Capra, 1998; Lentin, 2004). However, this study goes further in documenting a novel approach for using museums and cultural spaces as effective settings for allowing Holocaust survivors, child survivors and their offspring to cope with their losses outside the traditional psychotherapeutic setting, which many survivors are reluctant to become involved in (Kellermann, 2001). *Faces of Loss* did, however, enable a number of its participants to experience the benefits of a therapeutic process in the setting of a local community space. Moreover, the study confirms that photographic images constitute effective vehicles for enabling this therapeutic experience to develop. Through the activities associated with the images: intake interviews, displaying the private images in the public space, organizing activities that facilitated personal disclosure, mourning, denunciation and education, the planners of the exhibition facilitated emotional healing at an individual and community level.
In exploring the impact of the exhibition on the participants’ well being, this study indicates that *Faces of Loss* was a breakthrough in several respects.

**Talking about the Losses**

Of particular importance were the changes in the family dynamics that *Faces of Loss* generated. The literature on Holocaust survivors and their families notes how these families are locked in a “double wall” (Bar-On, 1995, p.20) of silence where parents did not tell and children did not ask, sensing their parents’ emotional fragility (Bar-On, 1995). In many families, the Holocaust has become a family taboo, a topic surrounded by secretiveness (Hass, 1990). Despite some families’ awareness of the need to break this silence, it is unlikely that this silence can be broken without any external catalyst. *Faces of Loss*, as a project aimed to memorialize dead relatives through encouraging families to participate with pictures of their lost ones during the Holocaust, acted as a catalyst to break the pervading silence around the topic. This triggered a conversation between Holocaust survivors and their children on a topic described by Bar-On as traditionally engulfed in silence (Bar-On, 1995).

Through participating in the exhibition, the second generation children were able to break the silence regarding the dead relatives and bring out to the public arena those “ghosts” that had been haunting them since their early years (Kellermann, 2001). *Faces of Loss* enabled the second generation to deal with “specters” which are harder to grasp than solid realities (Hoffman, 2004, p. 73). The findings of this study take up questions raised by scholars who have studied the Holocaust’s impact on second generations, such as, “How do we mourn an absence?” “Can we grieve without having a specific image of loss?” (Kahane, 2001, p. 30). These kinds of questions emphasize the second
generation’s need to have some form of memory that will allow them to eventually
grieve a past that they did not experience, but that nonetheless is very central in
shaping their inner world. The visual display of the enlarged faces of their relatives
provided them with the medium to relate to those mysterious, ghostly figures they had
somehow heard about since their early years and that had left them with lasting
impressions. It also allowed second and third generations to take ownership of the
family’s past.

Mourning

This study provides empirical evidence on the role of museums in facilitating
mourning processes in Holocaust survivors and their families. The findings confirm that
Holocaust museums can function as symbolic cemeteries and mourning sites for
Holocaust and genocide survivors whose relatives did not have a proper burial (Hass,
1995; Huyssen,1994; La Capra,1998; Lentin, 2004). As well, the study documents
alternative strategies to assist aging survivors work through their losses. Having
Holocaust museums engage aging survivors in mourning practices is paramount, since
this group is at a stage in their lives where they face further vital losses as their
spouses, friends and remaining siblings perish. In this respect, the mental health
literature stresses the importance, for aging survivors, of working through their losses in
order to achieve an integration of their lives (Krystal 1984; Mazor et al., 1990; Valent,
1998).

This project offers empirical evidence for the use of photographs in facilitating
mourning practices. In a fashion different from other Holocaust centres and museums,
mourning rituals were performed in the presence of visual images of the lost relatives at
the VHEC. It appears that the displayed images enabled participants to feel more connected with dead relatives, and in so doing, the exhibition helped them to work through mourning processes. The new paradigm of mourning emphasizes the preservation of the survivors’ attachment with their lost objects within the context of their ongoing lives (Neimeyer, 2001). The reconnection that some survivors were able to achieve with their dead relatives through their displayed images allowed them to mourn their losses individually and collectively. Particularly salient was the fact that this exhibition enabled participants to engage in communal Jewish mourning rituals in a non-religious setting – which had a particular appeal to some survivors who had disavowed religious practices.

**Engaging in Social Action**

This study also lends support to the existing literature on the benefits of engaging Holocaust survivors and the second generation in educational projects aimed to teach younger generations about the Holocaust and the perils of bigotry and racism. This is particularly important for aging survivors who, even at this advanced stage of their lives, can benefit from engaging in initiatives they consider meaningful (Kellermann, 2001; Krell, 1985, 1990; Pennebaker et al., 1989; Valent, 1989). Additionally, the study further demonstrates how local Holocaust education centres and museums can be used as spaces for empowering survivors though their participation in projects that offer them a listening community that bears witness to their losses. As well, the study suggests that aging Holocaust and child survivors can participate in social action projects within the limits of their physical and emotional capacities.
Practical Implications of this Study

Most importantly, this investigation illustrates the effectiveness of bringing private memories into the public sphere as a museum practice. The findings suggest that the *Faces of Loss* exhibition had an impact on participants in different ways. It appealed to their cognitive and emotional side, and had an impact at a family and community level as well. In general, this project supports the “interdisciplinary approach of museum studies” (Williams, 2007, p.191), and provides evidence of the interplay amongst overlapping contexts - the personal, social, cultural - that can occur in mounting a memorial exhibition like *Faces of Loss*. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic under study has various practical implications as noted in the following sections.

Holocaust Studies

Personalizing the Holocaust has become the new paradigm for Holocaust museums since the 90’s. This change of perspective in how the Holocaust is being presented to audiences is intended to present victims as individuals, not as an abstract number, in order to make this event more comprehensible to the public by fostering identification with the victims (Lassig & Pohl, 2007; Wollaston, 2005). Holocaust museums and education centres around the world have responded to growing demands to give the Holocaust a concrete expression using an “individualization paradigm” (Lassig & Pohl, 2007. p. 158) based upon presenting the names, faces and video-testimonies of those who suffered through the Nazi horrors. Displaying pre-Holocaust photographs has been done before in the two national Holocaust museums: Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). While the
displayed images evoke a sense of empathy, they still remain impersonal since they do not resonate at an individual or community level.

This study makes a case for taking the individualization paradigm a step further by personalizing losses of the local community in local museums exhibitions that show the participants’ relatives in their normal lives before the Holocaust. By mounting a memorial exhibition with the photographic images of the murdered relatives of the local community, the curator of *Faces of Loss* gave a concrete expression to the losses of that community. *Faces of Loss* was able to provide participants with a mosaic of photographic images that resonated at a very personal level. At the same time, this mosaic crystallized individual losses in a collective representation that strengthened their membership in the local community of loss. The production of meaning for the viewers of a pre-Holocaust photograph display proves very different in a local museum than in a national museum. A memorial exhibition such as *Faces of Loss* opens new possibilities for local museums in personalizing the Holocaust.

**Museum Studies**

In the last five years, the literature that deals with museums’ goals and aspirations in relation to communities has increased significantly (Crooke, 2006, p. 170). *Faces of Loss* offers a new approach for engaging the local community in the creation of memorial spaces, thus supporting Lavine’s (1992) argument regarding the potential of community museums as innovators in museum-community relationships (p.138). In *Faces of Loss*, the community’s input was voiced directly to the curator by the community participants without them having to go through an intermediary – advisory group – to voice their concerns. This constituted a different approach to the traditional
partnership between museum and community, where an advisory group acts as liaison to the community. *Faces of Loss* constitutes an example of a basically unmediated collaborative project between the museum curator and the local community.

Accordingly, the creation of this exhibition expands the concept of the community as active participant given that the feasibility of the project was to be determined by the response from the community. In discussing novel approaches to museum exhibitions, Munley, Roberts, Soren and Hayward (2007) argue in favour of applying to museums the concept of “collaborative customization” (p. 83) which basically refers to having museums respond to the needs and desires of the community without compromising its mandate and values. The resounding response from the community to the *Faces of Loss* exhibition constitutes an example of museum customization and as such contributes to the body of knowledge on museums’ best practices.

Furthermore, *Faces of Loss* demonstrates an innovative approach in local museums’ relationships with communities where the museum is in charge of organizational control (vision of the overall exhibition, financial and staff resources), and the community contributes the objects to be displayed. Lacking a textual overarching narrative, it was up to the community members to create narratives through their own individual captions. The turning over of power to the community members is an important shift from mainstream museum practices and it has particular relevance when creating memorial exhibitions. Considering the prevalent role memorial museums and exhibitions play in contemporary society, where they have become “a socially appropriate place to explore personal feelings of sadness and bereavement” (Williamson, 2007, p.165), creating customized memorial spaces that resonate with
community members will enhance the impact of these memorial spaces on the participants.

Community Studies

Another issue explored in this study is the sociological salience of local Holocaust museums in creating a sense of community among its participants. Through its collective space, the *Faces of Loss* exhibition contributed to the creation of a “community of loss” among the participants of *Faces of Loss* despite differences of class, gender, nationality and experiences during the Holocaust. By creating an exhibition based on a common experience among the participants, *Faces of Loss* contributed to creating a sense of collective identity and belonging among the participants. As participants connected with others' memories, it gave them a sense of belonging to what Simon (2000) describes as a “community of memory” (p.12) wherein participants’ perceived membership in a community of memory provides grounds for engaging members in practices of remembrance (p.12). The findings of this study attest to the role memorial exhibitions play in community building practices and contribute to a rapidly growing literature on the potential of museums to engage in community construction and consolidation.

This investigation has also addressed the importance of local museums in facilitating therapeutic processes for communities whose members have gone through massive trauma. The implications of these findings expand the possibilities of the role local Holocaust museums can play in this respect for their communities. Local museums can function as effective venues for enabling their community members to remember
and work through their losses, thereby performing a vital role as therapeutic spaces for the local community of survivors and their families.

**Memory Studies**

This study highlights the role of local Holocaust museums as shapers of local collective memory. Unlike national Holocaust museums such as the USHMM in the United States and Yad Vashem in Israel, which have a nationalistic or universalistic approach to Holocaust memory, local Holocaust centres have a unique position since they can convey their members’ own particularistic memories. These institutions can offer the local community of Holocaust survivors, whose role in the creation of these museums has been central, ownership over their own Holocaust memories.

This study also suggests a broader role for local museums as repositories of local Holocaust communities’ memories. A memorial project like *Faces of Loss* offers the broader community of loss an opportunity to institutionalize their private memories. The creation of an online version of *Faces of Loss* enabled those community members who did not possess any photographs to add the names of their relatives to the online version and thus become part of the institutionalized memory of the community.

**Intergenerational Relations Studies**

Another dimension of this study is that it reveals how family members’ participation in a memorial exhibition can foster changes in family dynamics. Much has been emphasized in the literature that deals with Holocaust survivors and their families about the need for “establishing more open communication, thereby alleviating some of the damaging effects of the conspiracy of silence” (Felsen, 1998, p. 65). The literature further posits family therapy as the best approach for enabling families to break this
silence (Fossion et al., 2003; Krell, 1982; Kellerman, 2001). The findings of this project indicate that changes within Holocaust families’ dynamics can occur outside the conventional psychotherapeutic context. Local Holocaust museums can serve as an alternative venue for this goal. The mounting of exhibitions, such as *Faces of Loss*, that resonate deeply with the families’ need to honour the memory of dead relatives, have the potential to open up conversations between Holocaust survivors and their children. In the case of *Faces of Loss*, this dialogue occurred because the activities integral to the *Faces of Loss* exhibition provided the framework and impetus for opening up taboo conversations.

This study also revealed that the third generation can be actively engaged in a project related to their families' Holocaust past. As Holocaust families develop and the younger generations are historically and geographically more distant from the Holocaust, projects such as *Faces of Loss* provide new generations with the means to learn about the historical experiences of their family and to connect with them and make meaning of their legacies.

**Future Directions**

This investigation has drawn upon a variety of disciplines to explore a central question: what are the meanings for Holocaust survivors and their relatives of bringing out to the public sphere the photographs of their deceased relatives? By moving beyond the intra-disciplinary concerns, and bringing together the areas of collective memory, photography, museum studies, trauma, and Holocaust representation, this study adopted an interdisciplinary approach to better understand the multidimensional aspects of the *Faces of Loss* exhibition. This research recommends further attention to the
potential contributions of interdisciplinary dialogue in community-based initiatives and underscores the value of adopting a cross-disciplinary approach.

While my research has focused primarily on the mounting of a pre-Holocaust photography exhibition in a local Holocaust education centre, the guiding framework presented here is applicable to other local groups which have experienced other types of trauma as well. This study opens other possibilities for future research based on community museums and their potential function as venues for helping communities work through their shared trauma.

In describing the social dimension of trauma, Erickson (1995) notes that “sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of the mind and body” (p. 185). From this recognition of the social dimension of trauma, the possibility emerges of utilizing social and cultural institutions for helping communities cope with their traumatic pasts. Museums can creatively engage these communities in memorial projects as a way to facilitate collective and individual healing practices.

Two potential groups that could benefit from an approach that utilizes the community’s cultural spaces as a context for healing are the aboriginal and refugee communities. Regarding Aboriginal communities, a community-based healing initiative similar to Faces of Loss could benefit Aboriginal communities who have engaged in healing projects to cope with the legacy of the abusive practices of residential schools. Key findings in Aboriginal healing initiatives stress the importance of community healing as a necessary complement to individual healing. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has concluded that “culture is a good medicine” (De Gagne, 2007, p.53). The concept of
utilizing cultural spaces for community-based healing initiatives invites future research projects on refugees who have fled from political violence and reside in other countries. In many refugee communities, Western clinical frameworks that deal with trauma individually might not be “culturally appropriate” (Farwell & Cole, 2002, p. 19). Ethnic community centres and cultural spaces serving refugee populations, and thus regarded by its members as spaces for interacting with other people with whom they share past experiences, values and culture, have the potential to engage the community in initiatives that utilize the *Faces of Loss* framework for providing its members with memorial space where they can talk about their losses and engage in remembrance and mourning practices.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that the framework employed for the *Faces of Loss* exhibition could be extended to settings other than museums and community centres, such as hospitals, as a means of providing certain “communities of loss” (such as families and relatives of people who have succumbed to AIDS or cystic-fibrosis) with a public venue where they can make public their private losses. Memorial practices are already implemented by many institutions; nonetheless, the creation of memorial projects along the lines of *Faces of Loss* could enhance these existing memorial practices. As evidenced by this study, the display of visual images of the deceased could help other bereaved groups work through their mourning processes by providing a venue where they can integrate these losses into their ongoing lives. A visual display of their dead relatives lends itself to organizing activities, such as the one organized at the VHEC, where participants can talk about their losses, “introduce” them to others, and engage in collective remembrance practices. Moreover, a project of this
kind could also provide mourners with an audience to bear witness to their losses and put a face to calamities such as mortal diseases, creating awareness about them in the broader society.

**My Personal Journey as a Researcher**

As I reach the end of what has been a very long journey that started with my initial study on the topic of the Holocaust, I feel inclined to explore other layers of my involvement with this topic, layers that are more intimately related to my personal life’s experiences and challenges.

In 2001, I went through a major life changing experience: I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Similar to so many other people who had to confront a life-threatening disease, the assumptions that had so far guided my view about myself as a healthy person with the prospect of a long life ahead of me and many dreams to fulfill was irremediably shattered. After having undergone surgeries, I added a new persona to my existing identities: that of survivor. Being a cancer survivor mitigated the losses I endured as result of my illness. After all, how could I grieve my loss of health, body image and expectation of a long life, when I was surrounded by people who were actually losing their lives due this illness? I belonged to the privileged group of survivors. I felt that I had no time for doing my own mourning; moreover; I had to move on since my two young boys needed a healthy, strong mother. Four years later, my dissertation research began. I immersed myself in a research project that tapped into my deepest feelings and emotions. In focusing on the *Faces of Loss* exhibition, I was aware that my experiences as a cancer survivor might filter into my fieldwork and that these experiences could affect my interactions and interpretations.
During my interviews, particularly with Holocaust survivors, I became what Behar (1996) describes as the “vulnerable observer” and allowed myself to be shaped by the research encounter. Through the experience of listening to my interviewees, I connected with my own issues around survivorship and loss. One particular interview had a long lasting effect on me. After my formal interview with an Auschwitz survivor, she invited me to have tea with her, intending to socialize and show me the photographs of her children and grandchildren. As we went through the photo album, that also contained some of the pictures exhibited in *Faces of Loss*, she emphasized how lucky she was to have such a great family. I remarked how impressed I was by her positive outlook despite the grave losses she suffered during and even after the Holocaust, to which she replied, “Rosa, if you are strong inside, you own the world.” I wrote afterwards in my journal, “This is much more than an interview for my research, it feels like an encounter with that wise character of stories who illuminates others on life issues…on the meanings of life. I feel inspired by her.” I could not imagine that one year later, as I suffered a recurrence of the cancer, these words would come back to me as I tried to deal with the experience of being in a cancer ward with people dying around me.

However, not all my encounters with my participants left me inspired and hopeful. Most of the time, I felt drained as I bore witness to their losses through the interview and felt their pain resonate with mine. I felt invaded by a sense of sadness even though the focus of our conversations was on the exhibition. But there was always a time, usually after the interview, for an encounter between two persons – myself and the survivor – who came from different worlds but had both survived a calamity simply because the
odds had been in our favour. It was in these encounters where I realized that although our losses were not comparable, theirs gave me what Levitt (2007) describes as “a place for my own stories of loss” (p.21). As Levitt maintains, it is by acknowledging our own losses while confronting narratives of loss in the physical space of Holocaust museums and memorials that “we come to appreciate anew the human dimension of this catastrophe” (p. 37). I allowed myself to connect with my own emotions around loss and mourning as I bore witness to so many Holocaust survivors and second generations’ losses, and as Levitt poses, I was able to engage more meaningfully with the legacy of the Holocaust.

Limitations of this Study

This study had embedded in it concerns related to the nature of ethnographic research, such as representation. Despite the commitment to obtain members’ perspectives on the *Faces of Loss* exhibition, the self-selected sample of interested participants meant that I had limited access to those participants who may not have had a positive reaction to the exhibition and for whom the exhibition may not have provided any benefits. However, my fieldnotes substantiated, in a partial way, the views of other participants who did take part in my research interviews.

Another limitation of the study, given the relatively small and uneven members of the accessible sub-groups, is that it lacked a comparative analysis on the impact of the exhibition on Holocaust survivors, child survivors and second generation which could have furthered understanding of the particular meanings that importing the private losses to the public domain had for each group. My study did not take into account gender, class, and nationality issues and by not doing this, the study does not probe the
variety of Holocaust experiences likely related to these variables. For example, the meaning of having the photographic image displayed for a participant who lost their family as a child, teenager or young adult could be very different than for a participant who was adopted by a gentile family at a very early age and does not have memories of their family life before the Holocaust. The impact of these variables on the participants’ practices of memory and mourning were unexplored in this investigation.

Another limitation of this study is the absence of interviews of those community members who could not participate in the exhibition because they had no photographs to submit. Differences between those who participated and those who did not, in terms of how each group coped with their losses following the exhibition are also unexamined.

Needless to say, the interdisciplinary nature of the research posed limitations on the scope of the literature reviewed in any one discipline.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This study highlights the crucial role of community-based initiatives for dealing with populations who have undergone historical trauma and shows that community resources, such as local museums, can play an important role in providing their respective populations with a setting for memory and healing practices. Photographic images, as they bring victims back to the social world of participants, can prove to be very powerful resources in mobilizing these processes in communities which are struggling with experiences that still haunt them. This study documents an innovative strategy for working with photographs once they are relocated in the public sphere.

Regarding the therapeutic impact of the exhibition, the findings call for further articulation of the personalization paradigm in conjunction with the collective
representations that embody the sense of the communal loss among trauma survivors. Local community museums can act as safe and socially appropriate places to explore personal feelings of bereavement, break the “conspiracy of silence” among family members, and help communities work through trauma through organized activities of collective remembering and mourning. Projects centred around memorial activities can resonate more widely with the broader local community and facilitate their engagement in therapeutic activities.

In sum, this investigation explored the dual role of local Holocaust museums in memory practices: as repositories of the local community’s memories of loss, and as mediators for individual and collective memories. This analysis brings to the fore the significance of using photographs to facilitate memory work among Holocaust survivors and child survivors as well as aiding second and third generations in postmemory work. The study also offers suggestive leads for further research on the potential role of local community resources for dealing with populations affected by past personal and social trauma.
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American Psychological Association.


APPENDIX A: The Exhibition *Faces of Loss*

*Faces of Loss.* Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 2005
Printed with permission.
APPENDIX B: Family Configurations

*Faces of Loss*. Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 2005
Printed with permission.
Genia Zuckerkorn, Polish

Deported in 1942 from Krakow at age 14 with her mother and father.
Sister of Lola Apfelbaum.

*Faces of Loss*. Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, 2005
Printed with permission.
APPENDIX D: Recruitment Letter

May 30, 2005

Dear community member,

I want to thank you for your participation in the “Faces of Loss” exhibit. We are very pleased to have had such an immediate and sustained response from people in the community. This memorial exhibit provides a unique educational opportunity for viewers. The school programs for this exhibit have been very effective.

Rosa Sevy, who has been volunteering with the Centre and has helped produce the “Faces of Loss” exhibit, is a doctoral student from UBC and is carrying out research related to this exhibit. Her purpose is to study the significance that an exhibit of this kind has for people whose family photographs are in the exhibition and what its educational value is to those who view it. In this project, she is being supervised by UBC Professor Peter Seixas. Rosa’s research aims to achieve a better understanding of key issues related to the public presentation of personal photographs, and the role that Holocaust museums and centres play in providing a space for personal as well as for collective commemoration.

In order to carry out her research, she wishes to interview people whose family photographs are in the exhibition. If you are willing to be interviewed you will be asked to share your thoughts, reactions and feelings regarding this exhibit. Your participation is totally voluntary, and your identity and responses will be kept confidential. Without your help and participation Rosa will not be able to carry out her research. If you are willing to participate or wish further information please call Rosa at 604-224-3089.

Sincerely

Roberta Kremer
Executive Director

50 – 950 West 41st Ave, p. 604.264.0499
Vancouver, BC f. 604.264.0497
V5T 2X7 www.vhec.org
APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

1. How did you learn about the exhibition at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre?
2. What made you want to participate in it?
3. How did you get the photos you submitted to the exhibition?
4. Where do you usually keep these photographs?
5. Have you shown them to other people (children, grandchildren)? Has anyone outside the family circle seen them?
6. What was your first impression when you saw this (these) photographs up in the main gallery of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre? Did those feelings change over time as you saw the photos up?
7. How do you feel about having the photographs displayed publicly?
8. What do you think is the significance of an exhibition of this kind? (for you, for the larger community?).
9. Do you feel this exhibition has changed in some way how you relate to your past?
10. How do you feel about the commemorative evening that was held at the VHEC?
11. Do you have other relatives who perished for whom you do not have photos?
12. Have you taken relatives or friends to see the photographs you submitted displayed in the exhibition? What has been their reaction?
13. What do you hope will come out of this exhibition?
14. How do you feel about the use of your photos as part of an educational program. Have you read any of the students’ responses? What are your thoughts about them?
15. Are there things you would have liked to be done differently at this exhibition?
16. Any comments you would like to add?
APPENDIX F: Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 29, 2005

Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-8104

Consent Form

From private losses to public memory:

An ethnography of the exhibit Faces of loss

Principal Investigator: Peter Seixas, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of British Columbia. Phone: 604 822-5277

Co-Investigator: Rosa Sevy, Doctoral student, Department of Sociology, phone 604 224-3089. This study is Ms. Sevy’s doctoral dissertation. Once completed, this dissertation will be a public document available at the UBC library.

Purpose of this study:
This project aims to explore key issues around the experience of taking personal losses to the public sphere and the significance that a memorial exhibit with the photographs of the perished beloved ones has for the local survivors and their families, as well as for the broader public. Due to fact that you were among the local residents who submitted photographs for “Faces of losses”, your input about your thoughts and impressions about this exhibit will be very valuable for this study.

Study Procedures:
This study will be based mainly on interviews with participants who submitted their photographs to the “Faces of Loss” exhibit at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. Observations of viewers’ interactions with the exhibit as well as their written comments about this exhibition will also form part of this study.
The interviews will be conducted in one single session and will last approximately one to one and a half hours. These interviews will be taped, and later on transcribed but the participants’ identities will be kept strictly confidential and identifiers will be removed from these transcripts. The tapes and transcripts will only be identified by a code number and kept in locked file cabinets. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports.
of the completed study. Those participants that wish to have their comments attributed, can request that I do so. The interviews will be centered mainly on your impressions about the exhibit and the importance of having the photographs of your beloved ones displayed there. These are issues that bring up some emotional distress. Rosa’s training as a counselor will help to minimize this during the interview procedure. In case you feel you need some follow up, you can contact our coordinator of survivor services Giselle Levitt at the VHEC, 604-264 0499.

Contact for information about the study:
If you have any questions about the interviewing process or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Peter Seixas at 604 822 5277 or Rosa Sevy 604 224 3089.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the USC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your access to further services from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Signature_____________________________________

Would you prefer to have your comments expressed during the interview attributed to you, instead of being anonymous?

____Yes: I would prefer them to be attributed.

____No: I would prefer them not to be attributed.

Signature_____________________________________

Version date: March 29, 2005
## Certificate of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seixas, P.C.</td>
<td>Curriculum Studies</td>
<td>B05-0267</td>
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### Institution(s) Where Research Will Be Carried Out
- Sevy, Rosa, Anthropology & Sociology

### Sponsor Agencies

### Title
Private Loss, Public Memory: An Ethnography of the Holocaust Memorial Exhibit "Faces of Loss"

### Approval Date
JUN 2005

### Term (Years)
1

### Documents Included in This Approval:
- April 19, 2005, Consent form / March 20, 2005 Contact letter / Questionnaires

### Certification
The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

___

Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:
- Dr. James Frankish, Chair,
- Dr. Cay Hofbrook, Associate Chair,
- Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.
## APPENDIX H1: Table of Results

### HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND CHILD SURVIVORS

#### TABLE OF RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
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<td>Honouring dead relatives (dr)</td>
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<td>Acknowledging existence (dr)</td>
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<td>Preserving memory of dr</td>
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<td>Collective remembering</td>
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<td>Exhibition as memorial</td>
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<td>Opportunity to talk about dr</td>
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<td>Brings dr back to life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personalizes H. (face to number) makes victims become real</td>
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<td>Learning about other community members’ family history</td>
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Note: * indicates a result, ** indicates a stronger result, and *** indicates the strongest result.
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<td>Proof against deniers</td>
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<td>Make statement to viewers about victims</td>
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<td>Visually impacting b/c blown up images</td>
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<td>Memory keeper of family</td>
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<td>Tensions or critique to exhibition</td>
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<tr>
<td>The best exhibition at the VHEC, exhibition highly praised</td>
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# APPENDIX H2: Table of Results

## SECOND GENERATION AND BROADER COMMUNITY OF LOSS

### TABLE OF RESULTS

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<td>Honouring dead relatives (dr)</td>
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<td>Duty to preserve memory of dr</td>
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<td>Acknowledging existence(dr)</td>
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<td>preserving memory of dr collective remembering</td>
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<td>Exhibition as memorial or funeral</td>
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<td>Bringing private memories to public arena</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity to talk about dr</td>
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<td>Opportunity to bring out what was hidden</td>
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<td>Connecting with dr (photos brought them back to life, made them concrete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opening night opportunity to share and connect with others</td>
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<td>Participation giving sense of belonging to the community of loss</td>
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*indicates a partial agreement, ** indicates a strong agreement. The table reflects the responses of participants to various statements related to memory and therapeutic outcomes in the context of second-generation and broader community of loss. Each participant is represented by a number from 1 to 14, indicating their level of agreement with the statements.
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<tr>
<td>So viewers bear witness to what happened to relatives</td>
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<td>Proof against deniers</td>
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<td>Participant is memory candle of family</td>
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<td>Holocaust as family secret</td>
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<td>Praise to exhibition</td>
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Note: numbers in bold stand for participants belonging to the broader community of loss.
Dear (participant),

I had the pleasure to interview you in 2005 when I was conducting my research for my dissertation about the exhibition *Faces of Loss* that was displayed at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

The purpose of my study was to explore the significance of this kind of exhibition for the participants who submitted their relatives’ photographs. I conducted twenty nine interviews with Holocaust survivors, child survivors, second generation and community members who participated in this exhibition.

Despite the slow progress of my research, I am now in the process of completing my work. This project has allowed me to achieve a better understanding of the key issues related to the importance of having Holocaust museums and centres mount exhibitions that provide the community members with a space for personal as well as collective remembrance.

I would be very happy to share and discuss my findings with you, as well as the key issues that emerged from this study. If you are interested in meeting with me to talk about these results, please do not hesitate to contact me so we can set up a time and place to meet that are most convenient for you.

I can be contacted by email at sevy@interchange.ubc.ca or by phone at 604 889-5204

I look forward to meeting with you.

Best regards,

Rosa Sevy
APPENDIX J: Invitation to Opening of the Exhibition

You are invited to attend a special Memorial Program honouring the memory of lost family members.

4 PM Wednesday, April 13, 2005

Legacy Gallery of the
Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre

Kaddish will be recited at 4:30 PM

Refreshments will be served
Please RSVP to the VHEC 604.264.0499