VICARIOUSLY WITNESSING TRAUMA:
NARRATIVES OF MEANING AND EXPERIENCE

by

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Abstract

My interest in the process and effects of the witnessing act guides the purpose of this study. Here, I initiate a deeper understanding of the vicarious witnessing experience from the perspective of the witnessing participant. My central question is: How do individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma through narrative, visual, and evidence-based representations of traumatic events in the concentration camps of Europe?

Vicarious witnessing begins with abstract representations of the event. The evidence is witnessed firsthand, but the event itself is represented through various perspectives such as photographic or artistic images, survivor stories, or physical remnants. Witnessing the evidence evokes a potent embodied experience, so that a person can make the statement, “I have imagined what another has experienced, hence I believe I know.” It is through the imagination that a witness forms a picture of the trauma. Undoubtedly, there is immense power in meeting another’s experience in the realm of imagination. Compassionate action and social justice is based in this area of human empathy.

To best achieve my purpose, I use a narrative method that involves two types of analysis, *interpretive readings* and *narrative instances*, as an approach to understand the participant’s experience of vicarious witnessing. Participants in this study construct three types of narrative texts--written, spoken, and visual. Each textual perspective shapes the meaning that the participant attempts to express. As a first level of analysis, interpretive readings of the texts include general, specific, visual, and relational readings. Secondly, through exploring the interaction between various parts of these texts, and between the texts themselves, I explore three types of narrative instances--single-text, intratextual, and intertextual. Each analysis of a narrative instance is matched specifically to each participant, and I believe, is uniquely adequate for understanding the experience of vicarious witnessing.

My inquiry outlines how individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma, clarifies the meaning that participants make of the vicarious witnessing experience, shows the risks and coping involved in vicarious witnessing, and presents the kinds of social action that vicarious witnessing evokes. In the field of counselling psychology, the witnessing experience is an important aspect of trauma theory that has been left unexplored by psychologists. My research enlarges the social and theoretical conversation concerning the vicarious witnessing experience.
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Finally, to all those who lost loved one to ravages of racism and genocide. I seek to bear witness for you.
CHAPTER ONE

Vicarious Witnessing Begins

Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:40)

Vicarious Witnessing of Trauma

I was a vicarious witness to the story of his traumatic experience as a child. Although I was not present at the actual event, the story he told and enacted pierced into me like a sharp sword. My imagined images substituted for the actual images that only he could know. As I listened, watched, and imagined I became one with his story; it lead me directly into his trauma. I felt vulnerable and persuaded about the truth of the telling through his perspective, his childhood. I noticed that his words and my imagination drew me into inner images, into understanding, and into bodily embeddedness with his tale. His language and gesture bound me in experiential complexity. The story was out there with him and in here with me at the same time; there was no dividing line. I was absolutely present—entrenched in the retelling event taking place. Now, my retelling of his story to you preserves the evidence of what happened; I contribute to sustaining the memory and giving a warning to you of the dark possibilities that lurk in kind faces. Here, I attest to the retold facts as I witnessed them. The italic font indicates the context of my vicarious witnessing and the Ariel font is the storyteller’s narrative. Here is my experience:

In a rustic cabin hidden in the deep woods, there were many people watching the enactment proceed. It was like an improvised play, one which I might have seen anywhere. The players in their assigned roles—enacting the characters in his story; and the remainder of us sitting quietly in a circle around them—watching. I was naïve. I had never been in that cabin, in that room, in that chair, or in that state of mind before. I believe that I was open and vulnerable to the experience. Nonetheless, I was at ease. I allowed the words of the protagonist to flow easily in me and around me. He was telling a story of something that happened on a school outing when he was a young boy. He was walking, speaking, remembering, and re-enacting along with the others:

I am just a young boy. My friend and I are on a sports team that is competing in a nearby town. It is towards evening and, as pre-arranged, my friend and I are sharing a hotel room with the team coach. We eat dinner, clean up, and play together for a while. The coach is friendly, charming, and a little distant. It is time to sleep. I am surprised because the coach sets up a mock bed for me in the main room explaining that my friend will sleep in the
bedroom with him. I am speechless, unsure, something is going to happen; it feels wrong and very uncomfortable. I don't understand what is happening. I am confused and I don't know what to do. I feel powerless and afraid.

I noticed myself responding to the story. Everything seemed to slow down to a crawl as the players moved toward the critical moment. I noticed my heart pounding. The coach and the young friend turned and approached the bedroom. My breathing was rapid, laboured. They moved through the doorway and allowed the door to begin closing slowly behind them. My body was trembling, shaking. I could see the child slowly disappearing behind that door. My panic was mounting. I struggled to hold back screaming aloud, “Who will protect the child?” The instant the door shut, uncontrollable sobbing consumed me. Over and over, the question raced through my mind, “Who? Who? Who will protect the child?” It created overwhelming grief, loss, confusion, and pain. I wanted to run, to escape. I moved to leave the room but someone stepped up and held me. As the protagonist and his friend were--so, too, was I--trapped with no possible escape from how it was going to end.

And so, I vicariously witnessed it all.

It was a passing-through moment--an initiation into the power of vicariously witnessing the trauma of another. The experience left me bearing a profound consciousness about the issues raised in the enacted story. It changed me and propelled me to action. I noticed my own past; I remembered relationships, recalled moments that were narrow escapes, and other moments that called for me to do something that I did not know how to do at the time. I interwove the images of my life into the gaps he left for me to fill with my imagination as he told his story. In the process, I was awakened to my personal and social responsibility for all child and adult survivors who experienced abuse of any kind. I tangibly understood the psychology of child abuse for the first time.

*****

Throughout this inquiry on the experience and meaning of vicariously witnessing trauma, I situate myself as one of the vicarious witnesses within the settings and spaces of the project. Consequently, the reader will find my study to be strongly autobiographical because I believe that my own experiences and meaning making processes shape the storyline of the interpretations I present in the body of this text. Understanding my own reactions and responses helps to bring awareness to any possible tensions that may arise as I construct and interpret possible meanings of the vicarious witnessing experience. Moreover, I have witnessed from different perspectives in the course of the study. First, I witnessed my own processes and
experiences; then, I witnessed how others engaged in the vicarious witnessing process; and last, I witnessed all of us, as we constructed a means of reflecting the power and importance of our vicarious witnessing as a group. From these different perspectives, I have generated many interpretive pieces of the vicarious witnessing puzzle, which I attempt to link as a proposed interpretive vision of the whole. As you move through the discourse of my study, I represent the puzzle pieces in short narrative accounts in a variety of genres. My goal is to reflect my narrative understanding and interpretation in the genre that most suits the content of the account. I argue that this method of reporting conveys greater meaning so that the reader can grasp my interpretive understanding through the content and structure of my words.

The remainder of this introductory chapter holds two personal accounts that present first, my initiation into, and justification for, exploring the meaning of the vicarious witnessing experience; and second, develops my positioning, purpose, and direction in the study.

*Organizing a Reason to Witness*

It is a sunny day. One of those lazy days, that calls me to rest in the warmth, listen to the birds and my own random thoughts. I wish I could partake, but alas, there is no rest today as I attempt to sort through and organize the books and papers that I have been looking through to help me find some answers to the vicarious witnessing puzzle. I look outside and decide that I cannot let this day go by without some contact with the sun, so I pick up my pile of books and articles and head outside. I notice a flock of sparrows flying overhead, as I step onto my deck. I lay the heap of manuscripts on the dirty green linoleum of the decking surface. There are a few pieces of white plastic furniture placed in random spots around the deck, evidence of others seeking moments in the sun. I gather three chairs that stand in front of the rails that display heavily chipped brown paint and green mildew creeping up their base. I place the chairs in the middle of the deck and put books on one, articles on the other, and myself on the third. I lean down to balance my small transistor radio under my chair and turn it on. I tune into a talk-radio station and take a breath of the warm spring air. Today, as other days, the station is broadcasting an autobiographic documentary; the topic of the day is depression. A woman is speaking about her experience, and as I tune-in to her story, I think about how often these types of stories call me to vicariously witness the struggles and trauma of others. These types of stories are not only on the radio, but also on the television, in film, at theatres, in art, and in the daily newspaper. I find myself attracted to listening to these stories of personal loss and suffering, they often guide my understanding and help me make sense of issues that present themselves in my daily life. The stories somehow interweave with my own experiences,
perceptions, and knowledge. I wonder about how these stories affect others, especially stories of trauma. Although I have searched, the authors of the books and articles piled in front of me have only given me hints. Those little hints have assisted me by pointing me in certain directions. This is a start.

Thinking about my struggle for answers, I pick up Judith Herman’s (1992) book *Trauma and Recovery* and remember what she said about trauma in relation to others. She wrote that sharing a traumatic event with others was a precondition for restoring a sense of meaning in the world. She said that the response of others to a trauma survivor’s story could have a powerful impact on how the survivor finds resolution around the trauma experience. She believes that understanding the community’s view of trauma events appears to be an essential element for survivors in the process of assimilating the trauma experience and reintegrating back into the community as a contributing member. She speculates that public action, acknowledgement, and emotional response to trauma events might rebuild a sense of order and justice for both the individual and the community. Further, Shay (1994) asserts that, “healing from trauma depends upon communalization of the trauma—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and can be trusted to tell it truthfully to others” (p. 4). As I remember these ideas, I wonder about the community part, the vicarious witnesses, the listeners, and observers—what happens to them in the process? How might change happen in the community by their listening, observing, and knowing?

As a counselling psychologist, I am intrigued with the idea of models of trauma therapy that emphasize this communalization of trauma experience (Bloom & Reichert, 1998; Herman, 1992; Shay, 1994, 1996; Turner, McFarlane, and van der Kolk, 1996; and Weine, 1996b). I look at my collection of articles and books that name and involve witnesses in the therapeutic process. Fortunately, I found two forms of therapy that fit the bill and collected everything that I could find about them. I sort through the piles on the chairs and try to find everything that will fit into two stacks, one on testimonial psychotherapy, and one on therapeutic enactment in psychodrama.

From the heaps, I find articles and a few books that talk about testimonial psychotherapy (Felman & Laub, 1992; Langer, 1991; Lanzmann, 1986; Laub, 2002; Weine, Becker, McGlashan, & Laub, 1995; Weine, Kulenovic, Pavlovic, & Gibbons, 1998). The trauma that these authors are interested in is war-related. I recall reading the articles, and noted how survivor testimonies are intrinsically connected with the act of witnessing. The authors describe how audio, video, or written survivor testimonials are co-created with an interviewer
and collected as part of an archive that documents the history of political atrocity (e.g., the Holocaust during World War II, Bosnian war). They reported that symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder—re-experiencing, arousal, and avoidance (APA, 2000)—decreased significantly for those who shared their stories with witnesses. I notice another book on the chair, *Holocaust Testimonies*, written by Lawrence Langer (1991) who presents some of these stories. He was an interviewer with the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, and his writing is evocative and compelling. As I read this book, I found myself to be a vicarious witness to the indescribable suffering of Holocaust survivors. It was heartening to know that interviewed survivors felt and recognized the importance of vicarious witnesses. They spoke about their need for the community’s response in supporting the archives, the public recognition of their experiences, and the acknowledgment of the atrocity of the Holocaust itself. I put the articles and books related to testimonial psychotherapy in an organized stack next to my chair. I notice a familiar heaviness in my heart as I put an elastic around the manuscripts to keep them organized. I know it is that dark side of humanity that I cannot quite grasp that sits there in these narratives. It is challenging to witness and acknowledge the destructive power in the shadow side of people.

I look through the piles for documents that deal with therapeutic enactment in psychodrama (Brooks, 1998; Brown-Shaw, Westwood & de Vries, 1999; Westwood, Keats, & Wilensky, in press). Looking at the retrieved papers brings to mind my personal experiences of participating in a number of therapeutic enactment workshops. On the outside, a therapeutic enactment seems so simple—survivors re-enact their trauma story before a group of people who act as witnesses. The survivor and the group are under the guidance of a therapist skilled in both group and individual therapy. Either during or after the completion of the enactment, the survivor hears directly from the witnessing group members about their response to the trauma event portrayed in the enactment. Although this sounds straightforward, the therapeutic skill that goes into creating an atmosphere for healing cannot be underestimated. In this regard, I am reminded of a specific enactment where the witnesses played a central role. With group cohesion and safety well established, the group of 26 witnesses stood in a circle around a survivor. She went to each person individually and told about an experience of which she was deeply ashamed (attempted suicide). Each person either witnessed her confession by listening silently or spoke a few words in response. After the last person heard her confession, she reported that she felt shame-free. It was a powerful experience of the witnessing process. Remembering this moment generates feelings of hope about the possibility of healing. I find
myself smiling as I fasten the papers together and place them next to the testimonial manuscripts.

I sit back and close my eyes for a moment, enjoying the feeling of the warm sun. I remember how reading about these two therapeutic models catalyzed my decision to explore the process of vicarious witnessing. I remember realizing that in both types of therapy, those listening to the client's story with sympathy and compassion were vicariously witnessing the client's actual trauma experience through images in their mind's eye. This process of listening, imagining, and responding to the survivor's trauma generated many questions for me: what are the images or pictures of the trauma event that vicarious witnesses generate? How do they cope with the impact of the trauma story? What aspects of the story are most influential in creating an evocative vicarious response? I remember being specifically intrigued with the power of reporting lived experience as recorded in the Holocaust Archives. Through my exploration of this process I came across a report about the Bearing Witness Retreat in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland. I open my eyes and gather the various documents I had collected about the Retreat. Yes, here is the brochure—a weeklong exploration of the Auschwitz-Birkenau sites, survivor testimonies, witnessing rituals, interfaith ceremonies, and small and large group conversations. Vicariously witnessing the experiences of people in the concentration and extermination camps in this public setting especially roused my interest. I imagined the experience to be life-changing for participants. Notably, I expected my understanding of people's experiences of vicariously witnessing trauma to greatly increase from exploring the experience of bearing witness in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Putting the remainder of the miscellaneous papers together, I think about how therapeutic enactment and testimony psychotherapy focus almost exclusively on the survivor's experience, leaving the vicarious witness and the witnessing process at the margin of their therapeutic theory. I was pleased to find the papers that I am gathering now, as they show that there is a recent recognition that psychological repercussions exist for the general public who are not directly involved in a traumatic event and do not carry any responsibility as helping professionals (Hamblen, 2001; Pfefferbaum, et al., 1999; Schlenger et al., 2002; Slone, 2000). These authors focus on the response of people who watch media coverage of terrorist attacks. It was clear from reading these papers that we really know very little about the process of vicarious witnessing.

All in all, I see my inquiry as a beginning exploration into qualitative aspects of the vicarious witnessing experience. My main purpose is to explore the process of how vicarious
witnesses construct meaningful personal narratives about the trauma event; endeavor to understand the ways that people attempt to remain in a place of psychological safety during a vicarious witnessing experience; and identify the personal and social conditions that structure a vicarious witnessing event. Most importantly, as I look at all of my manuscripts in their neat piles, I believe that I need to understand and influence the need for inclusion of the vicarious witnessing experience in trauma related treatments. If I fall short, the effectiveness of present trauma interventions may be limited and thus increase the likelihood of traumatization for individuals who secondarily bear witness to the aftermath of violence. Thus, it is imperative for me to address these issues on moral and ethical grounds by providing appropriate resources to inform practitioners so that effective care is available for witnesses as well as survivors.

I look proudly at the tidy stacks of papers and books, feeling satisfied with my organizational handiwork. I notice that the sun is more directly overhead and find myself getting overly warm. I sit back for a moment trying to rest my mind as I realize the enormity of my coming task. I hear the time signal on the radio—the long dash and it is ten o’clock already! I have to get to school for a meeting by eleven! I shut the radio off, gather up my stacks of paper, and sadly leave the sunny day to the birds.

**Witnessing Research on Trial**

*Scene:* The wood-paneled courtroom has observers seated along the stage right wall. A large, raised court bench stands empty at centre stage. Down stage left, a small wooden platform serves as the witness stand. In front of it stands a podium with some books and papers on it. The defendant, *P*, stands left of witness stand. She is well-dressed and appears confident. Behind a large wooden desk down stage right, the prosecutor *LB* sits with four petitioners beside her. At rise: Off stage, the bailiff calls for people to rise, the three judges, *AM, WM, and LC*, enter in a line from upstage centre followed by the bailiff. They take their places at the bench and the bailiff moves down stage left towards the witness stand and steps in beside the defendant. *AM* uses the gavel to bring the court to order.

*AM: I call this court to order!* *(Turning to the bailiff)* Bailiff, bring the respondent, *P*, to the witness stand. *(The bailiff takes *P* by the arm and assists her onto the witness platform. *AM speaks to *P.*) Do you now swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in this matter before the court, so help you God?

*P: (Speaking hesitantly)* Ah, Your Honour, I do not mean to be disrespectful to the court, but by asking me to swear this type of oath, you are giving me a sacred duty that no one in reality could ever hope to reach *(Dooling, 1986)*. Not only do you ask me, under risk to my soul,
to state exactly what I have seen or experienced, but also to recall and tell the pure, entire truth about the experience—an impossible task! I cannot grasp a single, concrete unified truth about my personal experiences. Even with a simple experience, I must take multiple perspectives and use multiple means to convey its meaning. Meaning in language is fluid and perspectival; I can describe some characteristics of my experience, but not exactly the same way with each telling, and certainly not to total completion (Bal, 1997; Gergen, 1999)! Therefore, your Honour, at best I can only swear to be as honest, clear, and direct about my truth and experience as I can be within the circumstances presented to me in this court.

LB: *(The prosecutor jumps to her feet)* Objection your honour! The respondent is making a mockery of the court proceedings. The truth expected in this court is possible through objectivity, logic, and reason. There is no subjectivity in this court, only facts! *(The four people at the desk nod their heads in agreement and whisper to each other quietly.)*

AM: *(Confers with the two other judges and then addresses LB.)* P makes a reasonable point. We concur with her belief in the ambiguity of truth-telling, language, and meaning. In this light, the current oath does need some revision. We have often discussed this issue amongst ourselves. Therefore, we overrule your objection. *(LB expresses shock, sits down angrily, ignores the whispers of one of the individuals, and proceeds to sort through her papers. AM addresses P.)* Now, P, do you swear to be honest, clear, and direct during these court proceedings?

P: Yes, Your Honour, I do. *(P smiles as she speaks.)*

AM: Very well. You are present in this court today because this group *(points to the petitioners)* of traditional researchers has made a claim against you. They charge you with violating the scientific doctrine of research in your discipline. Do you have counsel that will represent you in your defense?

P: No, Your Honour. I stand as my own representative.

AM: Very well, how do you plead?

P: Not guilty, Your Honour. *(The three judges all make a note of her plea. AM nods to WM.)*

WM: Then let us proceed. *(He points to the other two judges.)* Although it is unusual to have more than one judge, the court decided that a panel would be the best forum for decision-making in this case. When we last met, we heard the view of the petitioners, and today we will hear your response. We each have specific questions we would like to ask you and I will begin today. I would like to start with asking you to explain the foundational
perspective on which your research stands. I think that you hinted at it when you objected to the court oath.

P: Yes, Your Honour, I did. Although it is quite complex, I will try to be as clear as I can in describing my perspective. Please stop me if you need clarification.

WM: (He nods.) I will do that.

P: Very well—I situate myself in a constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, the real world is unknowable yet inescapable. I come to know and understand this real world by interpreting, translating, and arranging my experiences into linguistically accessible and evolving constructs that allow me to make sense of my perceptions. I can only know the sensory evidence that I experience through language and meaning construction. Within this interpretive reality, my understanding and meaning making are context dependent and the possibilities of contexts are boundless (Mahoney, 1991). These contexts involve intersubjective networks that are dialogical (between people), structural (within language and culture), and multidimensional. Consequently, there is no way that I can control meaning because I will always be able to imagine further contexts that would alter the present meaning. Of late, I have been interested in a branch of constructivism called social constructionism. Social constructionism is a strand of constructivism that focuses on social processes and interactions. Kenneth Gergen (1999) puts forward a number of working assumptions that I have found helpful as a foundation for my vicarious witnessing inquiry. These assumptions are (a) multiple interpretations: for any situation there is potentially an unlimited number of interpretations possible; (b) meaning through relationship: experiential representations gain meaning from the way in which they are used within relationship; (c) languaging reality: as we represent our experience in language, we construct our future because language is the crucial element of action; and (d) reflexivity: personal reflection on our ways of understanding is vital to our future well-being.

AM: Alright, but how do these assumptions relate to your research?

P: These assumptions are foundational in how I conceptualize my study. For example, I believe that I literally create or construct my research findings as my participants and I co-construct narratives within the vicarious witnessing process. These narratives are based on our individual and collective interpretations of the experience with no single interpretation standing on its own. Through personal reflection, we put our experiences into a language form that gives us the potential to take action with each other and within the world. Our
interpretations allow us to jointly construct a vicarious witnessing reality. It is my intention in this inquiry, that by being immersed in the dialect of my topic, I will come to an understanding of, rather than a conclusion about, my research topic. It is through languaging the experience within relationships that my understanding develops.

WM: Interesting--thank you, P. Let’s move on to aspects of your research now. Both you and the petitioners have submitted reports that we have read and studied. According to the report you submitted to us, you declare your interest in proceeding with a narrative inquiry into the meaning of the vicarious witnessing experience from the perspective of the witnesses themselves. Is this correct?

P: Yes, Your Honour.

WM: Could you tell us a bit more?

P: Yes, Your Honour. I am intrigued with the processes and influences that vicarious witnessing has on people as both individuals and as a collective. This interest guides the main function of my study, which is to initiate in greater depth an understanding of the vicarious witnessing experience from the perspective of the witnessing participant. My aim is to explore the process of how vicarious witnesses construct meaningful personal narratives about trauma events; investigate what supports a safe vicarious witnessing experience; and understand the personal and social conditions that contain vicarious witnessing. The central question that directs my research is: How do individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma through narrative, visual, and evidence-based representations of traumatic events in a public setting such as the Bearing Witness Retreat in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland? My research question calls for answers that lead to an understanding of meaning that participants derive from the witnessing act. Creating a narrative is a meaning-making action for the participant, researcher, and reading audience (Polkinghorne, 1988). Therefore, attempts to understand vicarious witnessing are best accomplished through the narratives that vicarious witnesses tell. I intend to discuss my research in light of the criteria for narrative authenticity, as suggested by Denzin (1997), including multiple points of view, emotional intimacy, and verisimilitude (see Chapter Three).

WM: Would you speak a little bit further about what it means to understand your topic?

P: Yes, of course. I would like to remind you that I have written about this aspect in the report that I submitted (see Chapter Three), but will summarize it briefly for you now. Because my research method is based on narrative forms of inquiry, I will not be explaining about
the vicarious witnessing experience as if I could present a single conclusive truth about the
topic. Rather, I attempt to seek new or different understandings of vicarious witnessing
from the multiple interpretations presented by the witnesses and myself. As I mentioned
previously, meaning-making about the vicarious witnessing experience is constructed
within the “dialogue between us” (Shotter, 1999).

WM: I see--thank you for that clarification. (He refers to his notes on the desk.) As you know,
we are here today because of the petitioner’s concerns about protecting the scientific
doctrine of research in the discipline of counselling psychology. They believe that your
research is not scientific and violates established research doctrine by not using well-
established reliable methods, rigorous data collection, objective analysis, and not
concluding with generalizable results. Therefore, our questions will relate to your
justification and understanding of the inquiry you wish to conduct. I ask you to please keep
your answers brief. First, I would like you to clarify some terms. Is this clear?
P: Yes, Your Honour. Before you begin, I would like to address the issue of brevity that you
just raised in your statement. I anticipated many of your questions and included them in the
document before you. There, I expand in detail what I state today more briefly.

WM: Fine. Now, about the terms you use in your document--what do you mean by vicarious
witnessing?

P: For the purposes of my study, vicarious witnessing is a process that takes place when a
witnessing participant listens to, reads, or observes a narrative or visual representation of a
trauma event that a survivor or firsthand witness familiar with the event recounts. I must
stress that it is a representation that is witnessed rather than the actual event itself.
Vicarious witnessing happens when a person experiences an event through the unique
interpretation or perspective of the storyteller or narrator. This is an important aspect, as
the chosen perspective of the storyteller will influence how the representation is
experienced by the vicarious witness--specifically, how witnesses fill in the gaps in the
story through their own imagination based on previous life experiences. Because the
trauma event is not seen firsthand, the vicarious witness must depend on the reports,
representations, and perspectives offered in order to understand the trauma. Vicarious
witnesses must struggle to put together the pieces of the story that firsthand witnesses offer
to grasp for themselves the story as a whole.
LC: Yes, interesting *(nods his head)*. I would like to know more about what you mean by *trauma*.

P: Yes, Your Honour, I do need to clarify that. I define trauma on both a personal and collective level. To understand trauma at a personal level, I refer to trauma in a similar fashion as defined in the fourth edition of the *DSM-IV*...

LB: *(Interrupting in a loud voice)* Objection! The defendant is using abbreviations that make no sense to the court!

LC: Objection sustained. Please speak in terms that we can understand.

P: I am sorry, Your Honour. The *DSM-IV-TR* (2000) text revision is a psychiatric diagnostic manual of mental disorders *(she holds up the manual to show the judges)*. Although I do not agree with aspects of the manual, I have found it helpful in organizing and structuring the psychological complexity that is involved in traumatic experiencing. I will read you the passage in the manual that defines the parameters of a traumatic event. *(She searches through the book for the correct page.)* Yes, here it is--a traumatic event is one in which the individual "experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others" and "the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror" *(APA, 2000, p.471)*. *(She looks up from the book and addresses the judges.)* Having experienced an event of this kind, the manual describes two "disorders" that may occur. The first is *acute stress disorder*, which can take place during the event, or arises during the four-week period after the event. This disorder lasts no longer than four weeks. The person can experience *dissociative symptoms*, such as dazed or numbed feelings, dissociated feelings from the self or surrounding, or a loss of recall for important aspects of the trauma. The person may *persistently re-experience* the event through recurrent images, thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks, may *persistently avoid* any reminders of the event, and experience *increased arousal* such as having difficulty sleeping, poor concentration, or restlessness. *Posttraumatic stress disorder* is named as the second trauma disorder in the manual. It occurs four or more weeks after the event. Symptoms are similar to acute stress disorder, but are marked by their long-term persistence and interference with normal functioning. When individuals present narratives of trauma events, as I have just described, they carry elements of these types of symptoms. For individual trauma, we may be familiar with what happens in these events, but are less likely to associate media images and news reports to them. It is within common knowledge that events such as domestic violence and
sexual abuse or rape occur, but these events are usually marginally scattered within the news of daily life or hidden completely from public view. Conversely, Your honour, when I speak of trauma at a collective level, I am referring to larger-scale trauma events that are clearly in the public view such as war, terrorism, transportation disasters, and natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, that affect numbers of people at a time. In trauma events of this kind, individuals suffer horrific experiences and consequences, but the events are visibly part of public knowledge and awareness. Collective disaster and trauma have a deep impact--sometimes for generations--not only for those directly involved, but also for those who know about it through family member involvement, media reporting, and political consequence. Narrative representations of this kind may be multilayered with many personal experiences associated with media images, family stories, or narratives of social groupings.

LC: Thank you; that was quite clear. The final term I would like to know more about is narrative. How are you defining this term?

P: There are many ideas about what constitutes a narrative. (P searches through her papers and finds a piece of yellow paper.) From authors such as Bal (1997), Bruner (1990), Eakin (1999), Kearney (2002), and Polkinghorne (1988), I derive the meaning of narrative in my study to be any type of text where a person relates a story in a particular medium, such as in words, imagery, sound, movement, or any combination of these. When the story is told it imitates, temporarily captures, and attempts to preserve a particular perspective of life or an event in action. The story can involve experiential meaning, aspects of the storyteller's personal or social identity, and perspectives from a specific social culture.

LC: Yes, fine (he makes a note on a paper in front of him). Since you have clarified some of your terms, I would like to ask you to begin speaking about how you are justifying your research. Could you begin with your understanding of research?

P: Yes, Your Honour. I will start by saying that I concur with Elliot Eisner’s (Saks, 1996) idea about the ultimate function of research being the enlargement of human understanding. He believes that there are many lenses to look through when focusing our research, and science is one. Other lenses include the arts, which can encompass novels, poetry, painting, dance, and drama to name a few. He asserts that in order to have depth of field, we need them both. He further claims that problems and methods are dialectic. This means that what I believe to be a legitimate method also defines the constraints through which I can frame my problem. The problem in my research deals with human experience; therefore, I
believe that narrative methods allow the most appropriate frame and most favorable
dialogue in my research design to address vicarious witnessing experiences. This frame
will support my interest in how people experience witnessing, how they compose the
experience narratively, find meaning in it, embody it, and express it in their lives. Last, I
claim, along with many others, that the symbols (i.e., words, images, gestures) we employ
in our languaged existence helps to construct the world we see and know; thus, narratives
construct knowledge (Bruner, 1990; Donmoyer, in Saks, 1996; Gergen, 1999;
Polkinghorne, 1988). I understand this to mean that there is ultimately no objective
knowledge devoid of the subjectivity of the knower—we see what we expect to see and to
some extent, what we want to see.

LB: (Standing up) Objection! This is nonsense—narratives constructing knowledge! Narrative
methods are not reliable in finding true knowledge about phenomena.

AM: That is true. Objection sustained. How do you address this concern, P?

P: Your Honour, the concept of reliability is connected to the stability of methods and findings.
My purpose is not to use a method so that I can find a single sustainable answer to the
problem of vicarious witnessing experiences. My research is more about understanding in
a new sense—understanding the multiple meanings and social significance of phenomena. I
do not accept that problems of human experience can be solved by single, objective,
distanced explanations, but rather by multiple, subjective, intimate understandings. This
type of fluidity invites possible choices in exploring, co-coordinating, co-constituting, and
co-constructing appropriate actions. In my research, I am seeking to bring the multiple
voices and perspectives of human experience into focus by situating myself as a witnessing
participant along with the others joining my study. Through the meanings we make in our
vicarious witnessing narratives, I believe my inquiry will result in a very thorough
exploration of my topic. I do not expect to arrive at an answer, but rather engage in an
interpretive, dialogical process that will generate productive questions that may expand the
field of study and call attention to aspects of vicarious witnessing that are not already in
our awareness. Your Honour, my ultimate goal is enlarging human understanding, and I
choose to do so by exploring current understanding.

WM: How does this relate to your data collection procedures and method of analysis?

P: Well, Your Honour, to begin, I do not collect data, but rather construct field texts (Clandinin
& Connelly, 2000) through participating in the vicarious witnessing experience. In seeking
understanding, I need a variety of field texts from multiple points of view in my research
setting. These field texts include descriptive fieldnotes, photography, artifacts (e.g., letters, email messages, drawings, performance scripts), personal journals, participant stories, and interview and conversation texts with participants. I have organized these texts into separate files for each participant. Additionally, I constructed autobiographical and documentary texts by writing my own ideas and experiences of vicarious witnessing, and gathered documents that relate to my study. My interpretive approach consisted of guiding questions (see Chapter Three) that I used as I explored participant texts for meaning. I have represented the meaning of these narrative texts by interweaving my own interpretations along with those of the participants.

WM: Alright, how do you address the petitioners’ concern that your study avoids generalizing results to other populations?

P: As I described earlier, I am not seeking a generalizable answer. This is not consistent with my inquiry purpose. I agree with Bochner and Ellis (1997) when they speak of generalizability as including the reader or observer of the research. Rather than generalizing across cases, they believe that readers can judge for themselves as to whether the study speaks to them about their own experience. They call this generalizability within a case.

LC: Very good, P. I think you have made an important point. As a final question, I am still unsure about how you have justified your research in terms of counselling psychology.

P: Yes, Your Honour, thank you for bringing me back to that. I would like to justify my inquiry in relation to counselling psychology on a personal and social level. Personally, my inquiry is strongly autobiographic and emerges from my own vicarious witnessing experience; therefore, I justify my research as a person called to vicariously witness trauma as a citizen of the world and as a trauma therapist in the counselling psychology field. I will start with a short anecdote about my experience of vicariously witnessing the crashing of two passenger planes into the World Trade Center in New York. As I watched this frightening event on my television, I found myself unable to make a separation between the objective event as it was broadcast on the television and my subjective reaction to it—it was as if I was there, in a physical sense. I filled in the information gaps with my own associations and imaginations, clearly visualizing scenes of people in the buildings, the planes, and on the street. I even found myself connected with the final moments of the crash from the perspective of the hijackers. It was a physically, emotionally, and spiritually trying time. What struck me most deeply was the depth of my involvement, my changed attitudes about
culture and oppression, and my spiritual understanding. Consequently, I find myself driven to understand this experience in greater depth. As a counselling psychologist, I meet clients that struggle with both firsthand and vicarious witnessing experiences in my practice. Currently, I work with survivors of sexual abuse who struggle with reports about the missing women from Vancouver's downtown eastside. I would like to know how best to work with these experiences and how clients make sense of them. Further, I believe that my inquiry clarifies ways that some individuals cope with the issues they witness vicariously, how they've make sense of the experiences, how vicarious witnessing promotes change, and what kinds of action participants take after their vicarious witnessing experiences. On a social level in the larger counselling world, I believe that the vicarious witnessing experience is an important aspect of trauma theory that has been left unexplored by psychologists. Finally, I believe that my research may shift and enlarge theoretical conversation around trauma experiences for the vicarious witness.

AM: Very well. I think that we have enough information to make our decision. The judges will now convene to discuss the case in the back chamber. P you may step down from the witness stand. (The bailiff assists P off the witness stand and speaks.)

B: All rise! (Everyone stands; the judges and the bailiff leave the courtroom. The observers begin to speak among themselves, P sorts out her papers, LB whispers to the petitioners. Shortly, the judges return and the bailiff calls off stage for everyone to rise once more. The judges return to their places at the bench and the bailiff stands beside the bench on stage left.)

AM: The judges have made their decision. Will the defendant and the petitioners please stand (petitioners and defendant stand). LC, please, speak the judgment to the court.

LC: (addresses the court) We have listened to both sides of the debate. From our experience today, we have found the respondent’s defense to be sound. Therefore, we rule in favour of the respondent and find her not guilty of the charges laid against her. In light of her articulate defense we award her court costs. (WM strikes the gavel.) The proceedings of this court are complete!

B: All rise! (The judges leave the courtroom, LB and P shake hands, and the curtain falls.)
CHAPTER TWO

The Loon Lake Conference: Theoretical Perspectives of Witnessing and Narrative

I was looking for a way to have a conversation between the practical lived experience of witnessing as it happens in life and the conceptual ideas and theories put forward by others attempting to understand it. I wanted to position my own conceptual understanding within the social and theoretical context of others because it is important for me to take account of the streams of thought about witnessing and narrative to see what new meaning or direction I bring to the field. In this chapter, I create an imaginary conference uniting the voices of various authors who have influenced me and from whose knowledge and expertise I derive insight. I present myself as the Loon Lake conference organizer and invite you along as I situate myself and my inquiry in the field.

Day One

I would like to welcome everyone to this year's conference on Theoretical Perspectives of Witnessing and Narrative. We have a very special group of speakers joining us for the next three days. I expect that you will be able to participate in all the sessions that you choose. Today we present a number of panel and paper presentations. After each panel presentation, we will have time for discussion and questions. At the end of the day, we will conclude with a summary of pertinent aspects raised during the discussion process.

As well, I hope that everyone has had an opportunity to enjoy the natural surroundings of this beautiful site. I was happy to join one of our speakers for a paddle in a canoe this morning. The sky was reflected so perfectly in the stillness of the water that it gave us the illusion that we were floating in the air; it was quite spectacular. You are all welcome to use the canoes and walking trails. However, the management has told me that hikers should be cautious of bears if choosing to walk in the north section of the lake area. Walk there at your own risk!

Let us begin!

Summary Keynote: The Witnessing Account

The topic of witnessing will be our focus of study today. I would like to start by entering into the literature on witnessing with a particular perspective. Although our conference title is theoretical perspectives, it is not my intention to develop a theory of witnessing from factual external evidence found in the literature, but rather to invite the creation of an account of witnessing. For this initiative, I summarize Dr. John Shotter's (1993) ideas from his keynote address this morning. He described an account as a process of knowledge construction that is
sufficient to acquire a conceptual grasp of the phenomenon—a view from the inside rather than an all-at-once external view. He believes that it is important to see the concept from all angles, and each different angle in relation to one another. He sees an account as a narrative of the topic that is given form by a varied set of perspectives. Hence, these different perspectives allow our concept of witnessing to form from the chaotic world of events that is our everyday life, rather than from a static, fixed world of things. Dr. Shotter describes the properties of an account as (a) being open to interpretation (not explicit), (b) working with the use of actual examples or models (not abstract), (c) containing elements that are context dependent rather than individually distinct, (d) consisting of incomplete descriptions, (e) shaping our expectations, yet not predictive in any precise way, and (f) being free of closed systemic features where elements are rule related. The only actual requirement, as Dr. Shotter suggests, is that the account be a coherent narrative that we can understand as a whole.

On this basis, as we share our different perspectives of witnessing today, we will build an account of witnessing that is not grounded in objective evidence, but instead works to shape what we may interpret as evidence. We will not determine or decide the meaning beforehand, yet note that we bring with us pre-understandings that may need to be expanded, disbanded, or changed in some way as we construct or create the meaning of witnessing in the course of our exploration of the discourse. In forming an account of witnessing in this way, we have the intention to understand rather than effectively manipulate a conceptual standpoint of the witnessing phenomenon. Consequently, I hope that we will be able to see what confronts us from within the experience, where the being of the witnessing experience actually exists. So, from this perspective, I would like to invite our first panel speakers to come forward, to explore the cultural understanding of witnessing experiences.

**Panel Presentation I: Witnessing in Culture**

In our panel discussion on the cultural understanding of witnessing, we decided to include speakers who are familiar with witnessing in the areas of law, religion, and the arts. Speakers will present a brief talk in their area followed by a time for questions and discussion.

Mr. Dooling, you may begin.

*Witnessing and the Law.* Thank you. The eyewitness is an essential player in decisions that serve to maintain fair justice in legal practice. Thus, I would like to begin today with exploring the dichotomous meaning of witness as used by the courts and by lawyers. In my perception (Dooling, 1989), the witness is both observer and reporter. From the witness-observer we demand the capacity for perception—a capacity distorted by opinions and
conditioning, and limited by inattention. From the witness-reporter we call for the courage and commitment to speak out, to express and convey the facts as witnessed, and to be subjected to, sometimes ego shattering, cross-examination. Consequently, legal witnesses speak out, sometimes, at risk of life, truth-telling, and reputation.

Good witnesses are supposed to be impartial. This means that they must neither change the facts of their observations, nor become changed by what they see. However, researchers find that witnesses with personal knowledge of an event lack this type of precision. This is confirmed by a considerable amount of research related to the accuracy of eyewitness observation, memory, and exactness reflected in testimonial statements (for a review, see Cutler & Penrod, 1995). However, there continues to be debate about eyewitness memory in the field of forensic psychology due to the gap in experiences between witnesses in laboratory research and witnesses of actual crime. Yuille and Tollestrup (1992) debate that the “involvement of an emotional response of a witness to an event is a central determinant of the subsequent memory for the event” and the consequences of remembering an event that “elicits a strong emotional response are complex” (p. 202). Hence, laboratory research falls short. Researchers such as Christianson, Goodman, and Loftus (1992) debate the other side of this issue stating that laboratory studies “do provide useful and also comparable information about highly stressful events” (p.237). They believe that simulation and interview studies show witnesses having both good and poor recall depending on researcher focus (i.e., accuracy in memory, or persistence or decline in memory over time). Even with debatable results, they believe that laboratory studies contribute to our knowledge about emotion and memory. Due to this controversy about the truthfulness in eyewitness testimony, witnesses are often mistreated or disrespected during the legal proceedings (Crawford, 1986). Consequently, manuals and videos that aid in the preparation of witnesses are available for both lawyers (see Finlay, 1999) and witnesses (see Crawford, 1986; McGrath, 1994a, 1994b). Despite these arguments, we can clearly state that there is no objective witnessing—observing affects the event and the observer. There is no separation.

Finally, primary legal concern exists for a crisis of evidence that is present in the court system due to legal procedures that often restricts, redirects, or distorts witness testimony (Crawford, 1986; Dooling, 1986; Felman & Laub, 1992; and White, 1973). Lawyers may not access the true knowledge and evidence that the witness brings due to legal practices during trial questioning. White (1973) explains this phenomenon by pointing to the lawyer’s responsibility in creating a specific image of the truth as they convert the raw material of life
into a story that will claim an image of the truth that serves their client's cause. Therefore, in preparing the witness to do the best service for the client, the lawyer knows that the most effective witness is one who is able to relive the event in the process of trying to report it in the court (Dooling, 1986). If the witness is able to tell the story with this special nuance, it helps to move the jury or judge towards a belief in their side of the truth. These kinds of witnesses become committed to the witnessed event; they can never be quite as they were before.

Ms. Harding will now present her perspective. Thank you for your attention.

*Witnessing in religion.* Thank you, Mr. Dooling. That was very interesting—quite a different angle than what I will share with you now. In religious literature, the term *witness* is used to describe the giving of one's verbal testimony of faith (McGee, 1998), similar to the witness-reporter that Mr. Dooling described. To be a witness, means to reveal, to reflect, to incarnate, and to represent the values by which Christians live (Read, 1986). In particular, it is the way that one does the revealing, reflecting, or reporting that is very different than in law. Religious witnessing involves actively proselytizing and testifying with the goal of converting others into the faith. I (Harding, 1987) studied fundamental Baptist conversion practices. In my study, I point to the use of language as a primary means of conversion. I maintain that the listener begins to appropriate the witness's words so that the witness's words (in the listener's voice) converts the listener's mind into the rhetoric of spiritual faith. At the moment of salvation, the listener's experience becomes that of the spiritual witness.

The most striking aspect of my description is the role of the conversion dialogue. You will notice that this process of spiritual witnessing relates to aspects of narrative and language, which another panel will discuss tomorrow. For now, my description of dialogue points to specific dynamics within the relationship between the spiritual witness and the listener. The relationship is formed through the struggle of each person to speak, listen, and understand the meaning of *spirit* in the confines of their shared language as they mixed it with personal intentions, accents, and meanings. This type of conversation in Christian witnessing is specifically structured so that the supernatural is experienced and communicated through words. Here, the language is intensified, focused, and “shot at the unwashed listener” (p. 169). I had personal experience with how a spiritual witness's words refashioned me—I felt implicated and enlisted as a collaborator in my own metamorphosis into the faith.

With a bit of a different angle, McGee (1998) sees all participants in the conversion experience as witnesses. The listener is a witness to the story of Christ and the speaker bears witness to the urgency of salvation. He asserts that the outcome of this witnessing process is for
the reversal of witnessing roles. He states that “lost souls bear witness to their desire to be born-again and the already-saved participant becomes a witness to the submission of the sinner to God’s healing power” (p. 220). Therefore, in “conversion” the witness’s words and beliefs become the words and beliefs of the listener who is now a new witness to the spirit.

So, with that brief introduction, I will pass the podium on to Ms. Malpede who will discuss two aspects of witnessing and the arts--theatre and film.

*Witnessing in theatrical arts and film.* Thank you, Ms. Harding. I found your discussion very intriguing—especially the part about language, which is an important aspect of theatre arts. To begin, I (Malpede, 1996) believe theatre is a “place of witness--a seeing place” (p. 231). It is a place to watch and observe a representation of the lives of others. To expand on this, I would like to draw your attention to the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy. The chorus is present in the tragedy to interpret the fragmented story of the characters for the audience. In turn, the audience witnesses the chorus in an act of contemplation--a visual experience of the inner life of the acting characters. In this way, we can see how theater and psychological aspects of the mind are connected. We have a need to sit together and “look at our actions; to be in community and watch our ideas of ourselves unfold” (p. 232). I see the theater as a place where we have shared experiences of psychic transformation where we witness what it is we think we might be or become as individuals living within, and responsible to, a group (Malpede, 1999).

I have developed a *theater of witness* through my plays *The Beekeeper’s Daughter* and *Better People* (Malpede, 1996). In these plays, I ask the audience to bear witness to the shattered narratives of survivors--to remember the fallen hero. By witnessing, the audience is required to bear in mind that people are able to be broken, “re-membered,” and finally to emerge again stronger than before. The theater of witness seeks to “reverse trauma’s debilitating effects on self and society by giving shape to the complex and cyclical stages of remembrance and recovery” (p. 233).

Tan (1995) extends the witnessing concept by proposing that the witnesses of fictional film are only able to participate in the represented events through their emotions, limited by the symbolic abstraction, method of narration, and film’s perspective of the event. Viewers can make no choice in the viewing pace (slowing it down or speeding it up), the performed movement, or perspective of view. They see the events in the filmmaker’s way. Therefore, the events they witness and their emotional response to them affects the degree of insight they have about the significance of the presented events. The viewer is emotionally open, without limits, to the witnessing experience of the filmmaker’s perspective.
Turner-Streckline (1997) studied the images of witnessing and bearing witness as a *performed struggle* in the context of film, theater, and literary text. She believes that the place of the witness becomes "inescapable" in the circle of performance testimony. Specifically, she concludes that witnessing is a form of political engagement. In her view, witnessing seeks a particular response from the viewer, listener, or reader. She proposes that witnessing demands a *social alliance* that serves both a political and personal understanding. Social alliance calls for accountability and change for all who participate. Turner-Streckline emphasizes that the change in witnessing shifts to listening *for* from listening *to*; a subjective response that says "let me be with you" rather than an objective or distanced "what can you tell me." Lastly, she points to the witnessing process as involving the participation of the body rather than the mind; especially when one is immersed in events that are artistically symbolized. In theater, the witnessing body enacts the testimony in response. This connects with Tan's idea about film evoking emotional responses through witnessing; the body's response precedes logical thought processes.

That concludes my presentation. I am pleased to be followed by Dr. Felman. Thank you!

*Witnessing in the literary arts.* Thank you, Ms. Malpede! I appreciate your theatre of witness and see your work as being very valuable to both survivors and community members. You will notice in my talk today, that I interweave witnessing and narrative in the literary arts as the basis of my work.

I will begin directly by saying that art is a medium conveying either a direct account, or an abstract image of what people need to know about an event or experience. In my book, *Testimony*, I (Felman, 1992) make a distinction between art made by the survivor or inside witnesses, and by society members or outside witnesses. For the inside witness, the greatest concern is with the truth. This type of witness attempts to strike out against lies, broadcast a warning, or speak the truth about what others do not yet know. A striking example of this kind of witness in literature is the award-winning poet Paul Celan writing about his concentration camp experiences. On the other hand, the outside witness is able to emphasize the corruption of social values, ethics, and norms related to culture, politics, and ideology. The outside witness attempts to present the witnessed experience in such a way that it enters into the everyday lives of people enabling a connection between the survivor and others. A wonderful example of this is the novel by Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus called *The Plague*--a non-Jewish perspective of the Holocaust. Thus, art from either perspective makes a reality, such as the Holocaust, genocide, or war, visible and knowable (Weine, 1996b).
As you can see, literature serves both the inside and outside witness in different ways. The inside witness writes for himself. This is illustrated by Celan when he stated, “I have written poems so as to speak, to orient myself, to explore where I was and was meant to go, to sketch out reality for myself” (quoted by Felman, 1992, p. 25). On the other hand, the outside witness bears in mind the imagined response of the reading audience. Regardless of whether the author is writing for himself or for an audience, a relationship develops between writer and reader. In testimonial literature, the writer bears witness to an event making previously unknown aspects available (Felman & Laub, 1992). The reader then shares with the writer the shock and dismay that the testimony uncovers. Consequently, the reader acts as a witness to the testimonial and a vicarious witness to the event. According to Hochman (1991), there is a distinct interchange between reader and writer when the text enters the reader’s mind. The reader modifies, expands, and makes meaning of the text through the body of knowledge that the reader holds. She states that the text is the writer. In this way, it is not only the story or testimony, revealed to the reader, but also the writer herself. The reader witnesses the writer amidst the tone and language of the text, thereby revealing the significance of the narrative context. Further, the writer exposes herself by the sensed distance that she places between herself and the reader. I believe (Felman, 1992) that testimony is a performance text where the writer strategically moves closer and further away from the witnessing reader as the story unfolds.

Weine (1996a, 1996b) describes the witnessing imagination as a part of the self that knows, sees, and connects with another’s experience of trauma. Through the witnessing imagination, we find a source for powerful artwork, which possesses the qualities needed to expand the viewer’s capacity for witnessing atrocity. The artwork becomes compelling, not only because of what is depicted and known, but also because it conveys an understanding that can move one beyond the knowing and remembering towards accepting the history of events and preventing their repetition. For the witness, inside or outside, art can transform one’s relationship with violence and destructiveness through the act of resisting, opposing, or transcending the trauma.

Finally, Laub (1992) proposes that the artist’s role in history is not so much to witness truth, but rather to witness freedom. Attempting to witness, capture, and hold a single, objective, and ostensible truth is an impossible task. The witnessing of freedom, on the other hand, allows the artist to connect with an act of resistance that creates an embodied experience by amalgamating symbolic image and emotion, instead of remaining in disembodied ideals. Art
expands our response outside of cognition and into our emotional intelligence. Art can create acts of resistance to injustice; a response that connects one human being to another as dry facts could never do. In essence, art pulls at the heartstrings of human relationship.

Thank you very much for your attention. Patrice has handed me a note that says we will take a break and come back in fifteen minutes for an informal discussion period before moving on to the next panel. She intends to summarize the discussion for us at the end of the day.

Panel Presentation II: The Witnessing Professional

Attention everyone! Please be seated so that we can begin. Thank you. Now we will move on to our second panel discussion for today. In this panel, we have invited speakers to talk about the professional witness—specifically in psychotherapy and medicine. Our first speaker is Dr. Arvay.

Witnessing in psychotherapy. Thank you. I am very happy to be here with you today. One area of research work that I am very passionate about is the secondary traumatization of mental health and medical professionals who witness stories of traumatic experiences told by their clients and patients. Thus, the idea of the professional witness in the helping domain is of great interest to me. Today, I focus on various ideas about witnessing expressed by researchers in psychotherapy.

In my doctoral research (Arvay, 1998), I pointed to seven struggles that therapists encounter when overexposed to hearing traumatic stories expressed by clients in the therapeutic setting. These seven include struggles with changes in: beliefs, therapeutic relationships, work circumstances, social supports, power issues, physical illness, and intrapsychic difficulties. From these struggles, I looked at what was helpful for therapists in overcoming these struggles in their lives. One of the most important was a therapist's connection to others--family, friends, and supportive supervision.

Expanding their focus on secondary traumatization, Pearlman and Saavitne (1995) write about two types of witnessing that take place among professional therapists—active and helpless. First, they describe active witnessing by therapists as involving community advocacy. Bloom and Reichart (1998) support this idea through their suggestion of possibilities for individuals willing to take steps against violence within the community (e.g. boycotting media that idolizes violence, lobbying for changes in legislation related to young offenders and stalking). Second, they describe helpless witnessing as experiencing powerlessness in attempts to heal the sorrows and violation of their clients. This concept is supported by the studies of Haber and Pennebaker (1992) who found that the difficulty with listening to trauma stories is
the listeners’ sense of hopelessness—not being able to do anything about what has happened to the survivor. As I concluded earlier, they recommend consultation or supervision as an important place to voice feelings, and work through the relational dynamics that create feelings of helplessness.

Kathy Weingarten (2000), a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, studies witnessing in relation to work that she does with sexual abuse survivors. She developed a typology of witnessing that involves her understanding of the different perspectives that people take in a witnessing situation. Witnesses in her typology include therapist and client alike. She believes that witnesses can be aware of a trauma situation and empowered to do something about it or aware and disempowered to take action. On the other hand, witnesses can be unaware yet be empowered to act or they can be both unaware of the trauma and disempowered to act. For example, the therapist as an aware and empowered witness may act in an advocacy role for an abused client dealing with legal issues related to her abuse. In terms of client witnesses, an aware and disempowered witness would be an adult survivor remembering how she had unwillingly and inadvertently witnessed her sister’s sexual abuse by hearing her father enter her sister’s room, the sound of her sister’s distress, and the stumbling of her father in the hall as he drunkenly returned to bed. In this case, the client was aware but unable to take action as a younger sibling. Further, Weingarten contends that each position affects relationships between people on multiple levels (i.e., individual, family, community, and society). Additionally, she believes that compassionate witnesses hold and model the characteristic of hope for the ones they witness.

Therapists may find that they are both attracted and repelled by listening to the traumatic experiences of others. Dr. Felman (1992) suggests that trauma events may pursue the one who bears witness through a process of repeated re-experiencing of the traumatic images. In this way, the witness is compelled and bound to what is unforgettable or incomprehensible, yet can find no escape. Conversely, witnesses may pursue the idea of remembering and speaking about traumatic events with an understanding that it can be a liberation—a freeing from the psychological and physical consequences of the trauma. In pursuit, it is the witness’s hope and desire to pull together the shattered fragments of self and move on from the paralyzed state of the “wound.”

Gerber (1996) adds to this concept when she writes about an experience with her colleagues and their struggle to understand their attraction to helping traumatized refugees. She described a parallel process between the refugee and the therapist groups as they met weekly.
The therapists observed in both groups, that witnessing involved a transformative process, a developing commitment to one another, and a renewed sense of hope. Both groups encountered a sacred experience of warmth and human connection within the context of sharing intense suffering and pain. The refugees spoke about incidents of incredible courage and strength that centered on the theme of answering the painful cry of their fellow human beings. Gerber recognized that the therapists also answered the human cry of pain within their work. She wrote about the importance of witnessing each other’s trauma as the essential element in healthy alliance. This example parallels Freud’s idea of the *psychoanalytic dialogue.* He understood the interchangeability between doctor and patient as an experience that occurs when the doctor’s own testimony of self *resonated* with the testimony of the client (Felman, 1992).

Finally, in light of recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America, researchers in psychology have recognized that psychological repercussions exist for the general public who are not directly involved in a traumatic event and do not carry any professional responsibility in the helping fields (Hamblen, 2001; Pfefferbaum, et al., 1999; Schlenger et al., 2002; Slone, 2000). These researchers focus on individuals (vicarious witnesses) who experience traumatic symptoms in response to watching media coverage of terrorist attacks. These studies are of particular importance, as I am interested in the impact of powerful visual images during witnessing experiences in a public setting. In general, there is agreement among these authors that probable posttraumatic stress and other psychological distress symptoms are associated with the content of trauma-related programs and the amount of television viewed. Below, I outline a number of quantitative studies that involve both adults and children.

Slone (2000) studied differential anxiety responses to television coverage of terrorism and national threat situations in Israel. She used an experimental design where 237 adult participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group was exposed to terrorist-related television news clips for an equivalent amount of time as the control group who were exposed to news clips unrelated to terrorist and national threat situations. She found support for the anxiety inducing affects of television media. Although not in the pathological range, her report shows that participants in the experimental group had increased state anxiety after exposure. Additionally, she differentiated between gender, religious extremity, and degree of dogmatism finding that anxiety levels were significantly greater for women, dogmatic men, religious Israelis in general, and non-dogmatic religious Israelis in particular. Her research suggests that trauma-related television media has a powerful and potentially damaging impact on the psychological well-being of the viewing public.
In a national web-based epidemiological survey, researchers (Schlenger, et al., 2001) studied 2273 adult participants to find the association between both posttraumatic stress disorder and psychological distress symptoms, and exposure to terrorist attacks in the United States of America on September 11, 2001. In this cross-sectional sample, participants self-reported symptoms using the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist and the Brief Symptom Inventory. The researchers found a significant level of probable posttraumatic stress disorder in the New York metropolitan area in comparison to other areas of the country. Among other findings, they noted the prevalence of probable posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms significantly associated with the number of hours of exposure to television coverage of the attacks. Specifically, the greater the amount of television exposure and types of graphic content seen, the greater the likelihood of psychological distress and posttraumatic distress disorder symptoms reported.

Other researchers (Pfefferbaum, et al., 1999) studied the survey responses of 3,218 middle and high school students exposed to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Two thirds of all youth and one quarter of bereaved youth reported that “most” or “all” television viewing was bomb-related. Television exposure correlated with posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms seven weeks after the attack. These researchers looked at the difference in calming-down behaviours after exposure to trauma-related television viewing as an important screening for distress in children and youth. Media exposure appeared to increase children’s attention to stressful images and heightened reactivity to traumatic reminders. They concluded that persistent heightened reactivity to reminders might, over time, lead to physiological changes associated with arousal symptoms.

As a last note, Hamblen (2001) reviewed a number of studies that indicated how adults and children in communities were affected by television coverage after terrorist attacks. She concluded that the television media plays a critical role after a disaster by providing a forum for public announcements, a source of hope, a tool for gaining information about the event, and a source of information about resource services for survivors and their families. However, after reviewing the literature, she considers over-exposure to trauma-related television as having a negative impact, especially on children as indicated by the majority of research in this area. She recommends gaining information by reading print media, limiting television exposure, and talking to people.

I now present to you Dr. Cody, who will speak of witnessing in medicine. Thank you, very much.
Witnessing in medicine. Thank you, Dr. Arvay. My interest in the witnessing process evolved from my experience in nursing. My (Cody, 2001a, 2001b) contention is that bearing witness—not bearing witness is a rhythmic unity that shapes the realities of human relationships. It is how we co-create one another. To understand this idea, it is important to point out that I see a distinct difference between witnessing and bearing witness. Witnessing is a direct apprehension of something in the moment, whereas bearing witness is the attesting to, or telling of the veracity or authenticity of what is witnessed in our personal presence. Further, I see bearing witness as being present, acknowledging another’s experience, respecting their truth, and attesting to the validity of their reality. Bearing witness means being true to the person on whose behalf we speak. Not bearing witness is a choice one makes not to be present, respectful, acknowledging, or offering testimony for another. Therefore, to bear witness and attest to someone’s experience, witnesses need to be able to articulate and report their experience truthfully. I appreciate when Derrida writes, “all responsible witnessing involves a poetic experience of language” (p. 293, cited in Cody, 2001b). Through language, witnesses are a link between the significance of a person’s experience and the telling of it to others who do not know.

Dr. Weine (1996a) speaks about witnessing from the perspective of physicians. He believes that witnessing is an evolutionary process, of which very little is known. One aspect that he believes is very important is the moral and psychological preparation that a witnessing professional must go through in order to be a receiver of testimony. He works with survivors of genocide and attests to the importance of literature in this period of preparation. Expanding on this aspect is Dr. Reifler (1996), who teaches medical students how to sustain the human quality of emotional connectedness during the process of their medical training. He uses creative writing in a class he calls “Reflections on Gross Anatomy.” In this class, medical students write about the struggles and difficulties in their experiences of learning anatomy using human cadavers.

Dr. Weine also believes that theatre helps us to understand and give voice to those who experience social trauma. He speculates that the arts may shape new ways of envisioning some of the complex processes of recovery by shifting away from the atrocity and focusing on the process of witnessing itself. Further, he sees witnessing as centering on interpersonal relationships and the transformative effect on the one who sees, listens, and believes in the individual who struggles for understanding. This relationship finds witnessing as a process of
connection beyond the self where an intense human connectedness has the power to rejoin survivors to their human existence, and allows the witness a sense of giving life to another.

That concludes my talk for today.

Patrice passed me a note that says we now have time for discussion and questions. She wants to remind you that she will present a summary at the conclusion of the day. Finally, after the discussion period we will stop for lunch, which will be served in the cabin just down the hill to your right.

**Paper Presentation: Witness Perspectives in Relationship**

I hope you all enjoyed your lunch; I thought it was delicious! This afternoon, we have three paper presentations that focus on specific aspects of witnessing. After a short break, I will present the understanding that we derived about the witnessing process from our discussions after the panels this morning.

For our first paper this afternoon, I would like to welcome Dr. Laub.

Thank you very much, Patrice. From my (Laub, 1992) work with Holocaust survivors, I have observed that witnesses involved in the testimonial process can oscillate between three relational perspectives—witnessing others, the self, and the self within the testimonial process. The first perspective of being a witness is to see or hear the testimony of others. The central task is to listen, see, and struggle to discover what to do without getting lost in the helplessness. This is especially important when survivors cannot tell their story, times when the emptiness and loss are too vast to speak about. Not telling leads to a loss of the internal witness, creating a shattering of the self. In the pursuit of not telling, people may even try to obliterate the story, thereby obliterating the audience, and in turn obliterating themselves. In this case, the survivor sees the telling as an unsatisfying and even impossible task. Because trauma can leave people feeling *sub-human* with no right to speak or protest, an inability to divulge their story exists because the atrocity so distorts reality that even the survivor cannot bear the truth of it. Thus, silence prevails and the teller loses sight of her own human relatedness. This kind of silence leaves the event without witnesses. Thus, the listener may become "the blank screen on which the story is transcribed for the first time" (p. 57) when the silence is broken. The listener participates in the creation of knowing about the trauma by hearing, recognizing, acknowledging, and addressing the silence. For it is through the survivor’s telling, being listened to and believed, that a knowing about the trauma comes to be. In the process, the listener or viewer may become a witness *before* the survivor begins to inwardly witness her own story.
The second perspective is in witnessing oneself. Survivors often speak about needing to live to tell their stories, yet it seems that they also need to tell their stories to survive. In this case, people may tell their own story of survival without recognizing that their own strength, courage, and character helped them to live (Laub, 1992; and Weine, 1996b). The telling of the trauma story can create the self-witness (Felman & Laub, 1992). Self-witnessing allows the narrator to reclaim the position of inner witness, reconstituting the internal thou and thus the possibility of having a witness or listener within. This creates a perspective where it is possible to have insight into the self. Bordowitz (1994) speaks of these moments of insight as dense moments--moments to make meaning and finally become the subject of one's own story.

Lastly, the third perspective in witnessing is witnessing the self in the process of witnessing--knowing and learning about the horror with another human being. This process demands individuals to retreat, reflect, and reassert the veracity of the past in an attempt to create a link to, and assimilation into, the now. I (Laub, 1992) speak of these moments between the witness and the witnessed as moments when time stands still--a connection between human hearts in a sacred space. This space may be synonymous with the co-constructed third space (Shotter, 1999; Shotter & Katz, 1999). This third space between people holds the stream of life where our shared language, thought, and meaning making takes place (Wittgenstein, cited in Shotter, 1999). It is the space where we make connections and come to an understanding of the other. This idea holds to the social constructionist view that in dialogue we create joint action in the space between us rather than within the confines of our own being (Shotter, 1999). This is particularly important when people join together in a vicarious witnessing experience such as visiting the concentration camps of Europe. Meaning and action are constructed and shared together.

Thank you for your attention.

Paper Presentation: Risks of Witnessing and Bearing Witness

Thank you very much, Dr. Laub. I think that your talk showed us a very important piece of the witnessing puzzle. Our next session is presented by Dr. Pearlman. Welcome, Dr. Pearlman!

Thank you. I would like to begin my talk today by reviewing Patrice’s written synopsis of the aspects of risk that speakers mentioned in the two panel discussions today. She outlined six connected areas of risk in the witnessing process--risks from hearing, imagining, and reporting; and risks to physical life, truth telling, and integrity of self. First, from a process of perception, witnesses experience either a perceptible event or a re-telling of an event. Witnesses
then process the experience and recall what they saw or heard in a testimony presented in any number of possible contexts. It is from the reporting or re-telling that the witness meets further risk. As Mr. Dooling mentioned, when witnesses speak out in a court of law there may be risk to their physical lives, the telling of a truth, and their reputation and integrity. Patrice expands on these aspects and brings a fuller picture to his ideas. As you all know, when a witness is in physical danger, our society has set up witness protection programs at various levels. In these programs, we assure witnesses of anonymity after their testimony is complete. Other more recent innovations take advantage of video systems so that witnesses can give live testimony out of the public eye. In terms of risking the telling of a truth, there is difficulty in expressing and clearly conveying to others exactly what one may have seen. Witnesses derive their testimony from things heard, seen, smelled, tasted, or otherwise sensed through filtered perceptions. With this in mind, we can see how difficult it is to come to a full and accurate picture of what was perceived; upon questioning, we are left with only a remnant, a sense, or vague image of what it was. This leads to the final risk of witnessing, which is to the witness's integrity and reputation. In cross-examination of the witness’s perception lawyers check for or monitor inconsistencies or flaws, and elements of favourism or prejudice. If witnesses admit to these flaws, lawyers invariably embellish and enhance each hesitation and imperfection.

Along with Dr. Arvay, my interest is also in the area of vicarious or secondary traumatization of therapists. This type of traumatization carries aspects of each of the elements that I just mentioned. As Patrice speculated today, a therapist imagines the traumatic scene from hearing client stories of trauma, then reports to the client her understanding of the event. The client may then retell and clarify aspects that the therapist missed. This process of the telling and retelling solidifies the trauma story in the mind of both client and therapist. When a therapist experiences many such processes with many clients, struggles, as Dr. Arvay described, may ensue carrying the risk to life, truth, and self for the therapist.

What can be done to protect the professional at risk? A brief review of the literature on vicarious traumatization reveals a common consensus among researchers that peer consultation or supervision is an essential ingredient in coping with secondary trauma. In early research, Lisa McCann and I (McCann & Pearlman, 1990) suggest that the primary means of ameliorating vicarious traumatization is for therapist to find “safe and supportive places where these painful issues can be fully explored and resolved” (p.31). We recommend therapists meet regularly with peers to normalize their experiences and discuss difficult case material. In one of my more recent research studies based on a self-report survey of therapists (Pearlman, 1999), I
listed case consultation with colleagues as the prime beneficial activity reported by therapists. Other researchers also emphasize the importance of peer group consultation in dealing with secondary trauma. For example, Catherall (1999) suggests ways that trauma therapists can create safe environments by moving into relationships with peers. He believes that a carefully tended peer environment allows objectivity in the highly subjective work therapists do with trauma clients. He sees peer groups as setting norms for safety and self-care, providing support, helping to correct distortions, and generally offering opportunities to reframe client trauma.

Iliffe and Steed (2000), concluded from their qualitative study of 13 therapists with heavy caseloads of domestic violence clients that debriefing and peer support were the most important coping tools for therapists in their study. Also of note in this study was the sociopolitical involvement of therapist in the community; this social action helped therapist channel feelings of anger and powerlessness. Finally, Ziegler and McEvoy (2000) wrote about the importance of their continual communication with each other as they co-facilitated a group for eight adult women who were abuse survivors. In their chapter, the authors outline areas where they were challenged by strong images, feelings, and conflicts that arose during the group. These examples point to the importance of witnesses needing to be witnessed. They also support Dr. Laub’s suggestion about the interconnectedness and importance of human relationship in the witnessing process.

To conclude my talk, I would like to say that through participating in this conference this weekend, I believe that research on the witnessing process may push our understanding of vicarious traumatization to a new level.

Thank you.

*Thought Paper: Patrice’s Personal Perspectives on Witnessing*

Thank you, Dr. Pearlman.

I will be presenting our final paper of the day. It covers some of my own thoughts and ideas about witnessing as I have moved through the process of studying the different perspectives on witnessing during this conference.

I see witnessing as a complex process working within relationships between people. This complexity has been of great interest to me as I have reviewed the literature and listened to the speakers at this conference. In this talk, I would like to present a number of my own ideas that serve to extend the witnessing concept in possible new directions. My four main ideas include the concepts of vicarious witnessing, trauma dispersion, witnessing after-image, and witnessing dialect.
Vicarious witnessing. I begin by making a clear distinction between firsthand and vicarious witnessing. After witnessing an event firsthand, a person can make the statement, “I have seen, hence I know.” There is a clear passage from the concrete senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and tasting into embodied memory and abstract thought. The witness is able to testify or make known the event with authority, knowledge, and relative certainty. On the other hand, vicarious witnessing begins with abstract representations of an event. The evidence is witnessed firsthand, but the event itself is represented through the perspectives presented by images, stories, and physical remnants. Witnessing the evidence itself can evoke a potent embodied experience, so that a person can make the statement, “I have imagined what another has experienced, hence I believe I know.” The vicarious witness is able to stand-in on the firsthand witness’s behalf to testify or make known the event on the basis of belief in the truth of the evidence. Additionally, the perspective of the vicarious witness is heavily influenced by the standpoint of the firsthand witness. This representational or interpretive view affects how vicarious witnesses fill in the gaps of the story through their own imagination. To attain as much of a picture of the whole as is possible, vicarious witnesses must struggle to pull together the pieces of evidence that firsthand witnesses offer. Undoubtedly, there is an immense power in meeting another’s experience in the realm of imagination. Compassionate action and social justice has its basis in this realm of human empathy and alliance.

Trauma dispersion. Trauma dispersion acts similarly to adding a concentrated drop of dye into a glass of clear water. When the drop hits the water, mixing the color with a spoon disperses it throughout the glass. It never disappears completely because the holding medium dilutes rather than absorbs it. When a group of people witness a testimony, the concentrated images of the trauma are “dropped” into the community. By debriefing the experience of vicarious witnessing—mixing the experience with dialogue—dispersion takes place. This dilutes the negative power of the trauma because it is no longer the sole responsibility of the survivor but rather the responsibility of a whole community. For an example of how I believe trauma dispersion works in a community I present a situation experienced by Felman (1992). He taught, for the first time, a university class where the curriculum called for the study of testimonial literature. In the final phase of the class, he showed the students a videotaped testimony given by a Holocaust survivor. After the viewing, Felman did not give the class an opportunity to debrief the experience. Consequently, the students felt shocked, isolated, fragmented, and disconnected. In this crisis state, they sought conversation and discussion with one another, as well as Felman, to talk about their experiences of witnessing the testimony.
After some struggle to repair the crisis through discussion and writing, the students were able to draw a considerable amount of learning from the experience. Dr. Felman stated, in retrospect, that although he taught this course numerous times since, there was never a similar crisis experience because he arranged for discussion to take place. I would argue that this important element of discussion dispersed the impact of the shock of vicariously witnessing the survivor’s trauma experience. This example re-emphasizes the essential importance of the witnessing relationship.

**Witnessing after-image.** The original idea of the after-image comes from an observation described by Goethe (cited in Schindler, 1989). Goethe noted that the eye is able to see the image of a color, plant, or object after averting the direct gaze away from the object and onto a white surface. The after-image of the object appears as a translucent image of the original object yet in complimentary colors. He believed that holding the after-image in view revealed something about the inner nature of the original object. Urieli and Muller-Wiedemann (1998) extended the idea of the after-image into the social realm. They believe that an after-image appears following a social incident. The after-image allows an individual to process what may have been missed during the original experience. Extending this idea again, I believe that the after-image experience involves the witnessed event spontaneously living into one’s sensations, emotions, thoughts, and dreams. It is almost as if the event is perceived physically in or around the body; a blended inner and outer experience. For example, when one is highly impacted by a night dream, the experience of the dream tends to linger during the day and occasionally intrude into daily thought. This same occurrence can be experienced after a stressful social event. I speculate that the amount of time that the after-image lingers maybe congruent with the amount of time one spent in the original experience. Further, once the after-image dissipates, it cannot be recalled or re-experienced. In vicarious witnessing, this type of after-image may be accessible as a means of processing the experience both psychologically and physically.

**Witnessing dialect.** People construct language symbols, whether verbal or nonverbal, within the embedded relationships of social life. The word-symbol is the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener (Shotter, 1993). What we try to say and what we are understood as meaning may differ in conversation. To develop “a sensed thought-seed into a voiced utterance” (p. 44, Shotter, 1993), the response of the listener, as well as the speaker takes place in a back-and-forth process of negotiation. In this way, the idea of a witnessing dialect focuses on what enables or constraints the act of expression in the witnessing process of telling, re-telling, and telling again. The openness or willingness of the witness to
listen, believe, and respond to the survivor's testimony may contribute to the teller's ability to structure the language of the testimony so that it touches the essential meaning of the experience. The witnessing relationship forms the context in which participants find access to a joint reality that enables the survivor to pass through or beyond the trauma wound. The reality of the survivor's story may be verbally shaped in response to the witness's point of view and ultimately, from the point of view of the community by the words that construct the language they speak to one another. Both Dr. Laub (1992) and Weine (1996a, 1996b) point to this aspect when they write about survivors reporting the importance of the witness's listening, believing, and understanding as enabling the formation of their testimonial account and eventually a sense of resolution.

With these ideas in mind, I conclude my talk. We can take a short break now and when we return, I will present a summary of the important aspects of witnessing we discussed today. Discussion Summary: A Witnessing Account

When everyone is seated, we will begin. Thank you!

Through our conversations today, we constructed an account of the witnessing process (see Figure 1, p. 36). As a reminder of the assumptions of our account, I reiterate Dr. Shotter's guidelines that our account: be open to interpretation, draw from actual examples, include context dependant elements, allow incomplete descriptions, shape but not predict our expectations, and allow the elements within it to be rule free.

Central to our discussion was the key aspect of relationship. All experiences of witnesses or vicarious witnesses return to socially embedded elements. The theme of social alliance, relationship, and connectivity run through the majority of the perspectives. Witnesses appear to be interwoven with the events and people they witness. Consequently, witnesses are embodied in the witnessing experience both as individuals and as members of society. Within the social context, restrictions appear in how the witness is able to report events to the audience, such as in a court of law or a theatrical performance. The context appears to be limited by the possible languaging constraints encompassing the reporting milieu. Further, bearing witness, as opposed to witnessing, seems to call for a more deeply personal intimacy in the witnessing relationship. In this light, we noticed that the word bearing brought up images of endurance, exertion, strength, and committed connection such as in the way we language health issues—"bearing the pain," "bearing down," "bearing the burden," and "bearing upon." With this sense of enduring responsibility, the issues around risk became more understandable. For example, unaware and disempowered, or helpless witnesses face struggles that could possibly
The Witnessing Account

Contextual Limits

WITNESSING

FIRSTHAND WITNESS
Firsthand Experience
Insider Perspective
Immediate/Personal

Experiencing-Reporting
*Witnessing the Self*

VICARIOUS WITNESS
Imagine Experience
Outsider Perspective
Immediate/Social

RELATIONSHIP
Dialect Dispersion After-Image

LISTENING-BEARING
*Witnessing the Other*

BEARING WITNESS
Social Responsibility
Standing-For the Other
Risk
Parallelism
Understanding

Helpless Unaware Disempowered

Active Aware Empowered

Contextual Limits

*Figure 1.* A visual summary of witnessing perspectives.
impair their personal or social health. In relation to this tendency to want to bear the responsibility, we speculated about the elements in witnessing trauma that might attract professionals to accept the risks of witnessing—parallel processes between client and professional, the desire and pursuit of human connectedness, the benefits of altruism, and the attempt to understand the dark side of human nature through the witnessing process.

Also within the social realm, we discussed the process of human communication and language being the central site of witnessing—a process of co-constructing realities. Through the mystery of language, we construct an inner vision of the trauma story that can be powerful enough to secondarily traumatize the listener. We connected this to the emotional aspects of witnessing discussed in the first panel and the idea of the listener being unable to choose how the client tells the story and what pictures it may create in the listener’s imagination. Pursuant to the idea of communication, we also discussed the witnessing professional as being a link between clients or patients and the community of people around them, specifically in relation to the importance of the witnessing professional believing the reality of the client or patient’s trauma experience.

We also noticed that there was a tendency to dichotomize the role of witnesses. For example, speakers described the witness as an observer-reporter, experiencer-revealer, insider-outsider, and as having either a personal or a collective orientation. Although witnesses have a concern for the truth, they are unable to satisfactorily articulate a single truth about an event or experience. This creates a tension or crisis in accurately reporting or testifying about the event so that the listener understands and believes the testimony. Last, the arts as a place of witness seem to have elements that are both protective (e.g., allowing an individual to see a traumatic issue externalized) and threatening (e.g., creating emotional vulnerability). As a helpful note, we saw the power of symbolism in art as a preparation for witnessing and as an aspect of healing for the witnessing professional.

In general, we gained a very full view of the witnessing experience through developing this account. The elements that we raised may become useful in future research in the area.

To conclude, I invite everyone to carry our work today into your conversations this evening. Dinner will be served at 6:30 in the dining cabin. Tonight, we have invited a string quartet to play for us in here in the main building. I understand that they have some folk dances prepared along with someone to guide us. I look forward to dancing with all of you after supper! See you then!
Day Two

Good morning! I hope everyone enjoyed the dancing last night; it was a lively and welcome activity for getting to know everyone. Many guests have requested that we dance again tonight, so I have arranged for the quartet’s return. Oh! I am pleased you are so happy about that!

This morning, I will address aspects of narrative theory along with Dr. Polkinghorne. This afternoon, we invite you to attend our poster session and an information session on the Bearing Witness Retreat at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland.

Opening Keynote: Thinking Narratively to Understand Life

In this morning’s session on the theoretical perspectives of narrative, I begin with a discussion about the meaning and function of language as a foundation for understanding narrative. For this discussion, I have accessed the ideas of a variety of authors in order to more fully understand the lived experience and constructs of language. My talk will conclude with a statement about narrative in the context of this conference.

I construct my understanding of the world through a narrative framework. I believe that people come to know through narrative constructions of physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual experiences. The foundation of my framework rests on the structures of language. However, in coming to understand the meaning of language, I agree with Abram (1997) when he states that we are limited in our attempts to define language because it is only with language itself that a definition is possible. In spite of this, he acknowledges that our conscious familiarity with language through its texture, habits, and “source of sustenance” allows us to speculate about its form, meaning, and content. Thus, I boldly identify language as a culturally negotiated symbolic activity (e.g., words, gestures, and images) that people employ in constructing and making sense of themselves and the world.

Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that there are three main theories of language. First, language is transparent and does not stand in the way of our direct experience of reality. In this theory, language is a means for storing, cognizing, and communicating about our external perceptions; words describe experience. Second, language is a distorting screen that projects experiences out of its own categories. The meaning of our experiences depend on the relationship between the internal logic (rules) of the words themselves and what they represent. Here, words determine the meaning of experience. The third theory suggests that words in a language acquire meaning through the context of our actions in cultural life. People determine the meaning of a word by the way they use it in their community. Thus, language is both a
product and possession of community members, allowing them to understand one another. In this way, language is neither neutral nor objective. In this theory, words are not pointers to meaning, but are *interwoven in the complexity of doing and performing a life in relationship*; language is a relational activity. In some sense, I see all three of these theories possessing an element of truth—words describe experience, determine the meaning of experience, and are the doing and performing of life in community. Polkinghorne (1988) goes on to say that language functions in our lives by giving our perceptions significance, allowing our non-verbal language system (gestures) to be understandable as well as meaningful, and creating or freeing the meaning of experience through interpretive or subjective truths. These ideas set a powerful foundation for understanding the role of language in living life.

It was of interest to me to read the work of Abram (1997), who clarified and expanded these ideas of language function when he argued that language “is not a fixed or ideal form but an evolving medium we collectively inhabit” (p. 84). The idea of language as a medium of life is a powerful concept. He goes further by presenting the ideas of Merleau-Ponty who suggested that language is rooted in sensory experiences where thought and language are dependent and connected to bodily experience. It is through the body being within the world that we come to learn and know the sounds and gestures of our particular language. In this way, we do not create meaning only with our words, but also with our body perceptions and movements. Tone, rhythm, and resonance of the sounds of speech are an active living expression of the sensing body responding to and interpreting lived perceptions and experience. This concurs with Polkinghorne’s view that the nonverbal aspects of our language enable speech to be meaningful and understandable. Further, this embodied experience of language is a source of knowledge about the self and the world. This is confirmed through the work of Eakin (1999) who states that the body is the site of narration and the source for subjectivity. He believes that in face-to-face interaction, it is the body of the other that speaks in the speech-act; the person is a speaking-feeling-embodied subject. As part of our language system, body gestures and form allow words to be understood as they are creatively combined in new ways. Indeed, it appears that the body is an interwoven representative of a narrative text. Therefore, in dialogue the listener becomes the reader of and responder to the symbols of the body text as well as the symbols and meaning of the teller’s spoken words. The embodied self is a narrative configuration or construction, a story-in-progress, a form of self-expression, a way we construct ourselves (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is a remarkable picture of human communication, especially in light of the relational aspects of the witnessing process.
Further expanding the idea of text, I appreciated the work of Bal (1997), a narratologist who focuses on the meaning of story structure. She defines text as a finite group of language signs that are both linguistic and non-linguistic. She emphasizes that finite does not mean that a text is finite, as the meaning, effect, function, and background are not finite, only that we identify a first and a last word, a first and a last image in a film, or a frame around a painting even though the boundaries appear to be permeable. This is a helpful idea, as my experience with narrative research is that a life story or lived experience is never-ending, yet becomes illusively confined within the text of a report. She goes on to say that a narrative text is a text where a narrative agent relates or tells a story in a particular medium (e.g., language, imagery, sound, drama, or any combination of these). This expands the idea that a story can only be told in word form.

Finally, I understand witnessing as a narrative act. Through the medium of embodied and socially embedded language, both witnesses and vicarious witnesses attempt to convey moments of remembering or imagining by weaving the meaning of their experiences through the telling of their story in some form of narrative text. It is through the story that they make sense of themselves and their experiences. As a narrative researcher, the narrative text becomes a form of self-experience and functions to shape and construct the narrator’s reality and identity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). In listening to a participant’s story, one can see that “self-narration is the defining act of the human subject, an act which is not only descriptive of the self but fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject” (Eakin, 1999, p. 21). Narrative is a promising way of understanding a life-as-lived, a life-as-experienced, and a life-as-told (Bruner, cited in Sandelowski, 1991).

Thank you. I would like to turn the podium over to Dr. Polkinghorne to speak about narrative meaning—Dr. Polkinghorne.

Paper Presentation: Understanding Narrative Meaning

Thank you for your presentation, Patrice. Language and narrative are complex processes to explore. My talk today expands what Patrice has introduced by focusing on the realm of meaning and its connection with narrative. I (Polkinghorne, 1988) believe that meaning is an activity or process that we cannot fix or grasp as a tangible substance; it is a process we can only sense through a fleeting hint or impression. The products of the activity of meaning are the names of perceptible elements (contents of awareness) and the connections or relations among these elements. The relationships between perceptions add to the meaning activity. These relationships include one perception that (a) is the same as or not the same as
another (e.g., an actual key being the same or different from another key); (b) is similar or dissimilar to another (e.g., a key reminds you of one that belonged to your grandmother); (c) is an instance of another (e.g., I see one side of the key and construct the whole key in my mind); (d) stands for the other (e.g., the symbol “key” stands for the actual key, the keyhole is an index for the key, and a diagram or icon resembles the key); (e) is part of the other (e.g., the key is part of the locksmith’s tools); and (f) is the cause of the other (e.g., the key caused the door to be locked so I could not get in). When we ask what something means we are asking how something is related or connected to something else. It is the connections and relationships among things that gives them meaning. In the language and narratives of a cultural community, a system of signs or symbols connects specific things or notions that they signify. I suggest that the intention behind studying narrative meaning is to explore how meaning is made in particular contexts in order to consider the implications this meaning may have for understanding human existence.

Meaning is best acquired through the qualitative tones of its expression in everyday language. However, it is difficult to grasp the meanings conveyed by others because we only have direct access to our own realm of meaning; it is continuously reconstituted as perceptions and consciousness change. In order to come closer to understanding the meaning of human experience, it is best to look at narratives through a process of hermeneutic reasoning or interpretive techniques. In this way, we can move between the parts and the whole as we examine meaning in all of its complexity. Denzin (1995), with his interest in interpretive research, understands that meaning does not exist solely in the sign or text itself, but rather he sees meaning as an interplay between what the sign or text is and what the sign or the text is not. It is as if meaning exists in the spaces between the symbols. Even down to the words within a sentence, meaning appears to be a moving target. For example, Eagleton states that “meaning, if you like, is scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers; it cannot be readily nailed down, it is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering presence and absence together” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 128). Hence, meaning cannot be fixed, there is never a static, finished form to meaning; it is a context sensitive activity. Consequently, there always exists a multiplicity of meanings, a dynamic moving between past and present, personal and social, situation and context. In this process, we see meaning in its emergent nature. Even after the sentence or text has ended, the activity of meaning goes on (Bal, 1997; Eagleton, 1983). This implies that as researchers, we cannot ever capture or adequately represent our or anyone else’s meaning or understanding of an issue or
topic. We can only explore the partial, limited meaning perspectives of the research participants as we move back and forth between the whole and the parts of their stories coloured by our own perspectives and knowledge.

I end with a thought presented by Felman and Laub (1992). They believe that we can only grasp meaning in the moment of its own production; it is a birth of knowledge.

Thank you! Patrice gave me a note to say that we will break for lunch and return this afternoon for the poster display and the information session on the Bearing Witness Retreat.

Poster Presentation: Visually Narrating Vicarious Witnessing

Welcome to my poster presentation.

Taking up Bal’s (1997) idea that a narrative text can be non-linguistic, I present three posters to you. These posters are an example of some of the artistic images that participants in my research project created as a way of bearing witness to Holocaust atrocities. The first is an archival photograph of a murdered person in Auschwitz (see Figure 2. Warning--this image may be extremely distressing to the viewer) and the other two are photographs of art pieces created by me (Patrice Keats) after my return from Europe (see Figures 3 and 4), reflecting the impact of viewing the original archival image. Below I outline my process of visually narrating my vicarious witnessing experience.

After spending a week in the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps, I came across a shocking archival photograph in the Auschwitz museum. While in the museum, I took many photographs of the image, in hopes that I could record it clearly enough to work through my very strong emotional reaction to viewing it. After leaving the Auschwitz site, the heinous crime depicted in the photograph haunted me continuously. I drew a number of pencil sketches trying to sort through its powerful impact. After drawing, I felt momentary relief from the anguish and a slight sense of contentment as I moved slowly towards understanding the personal meaning of this image to me. However, the feelings were deep and enduring. Even as I write about it in this moment, the painful heaviness in my heart and the nausea in my stomach returns.

When I began to create the first sculpture, I plunged deeply into feelings of grief. Over the months that it took me to construct the sculpture, there were times that I could not look at my own work because of the unspeakable horror that I was depicting. The sculpture seemed to be creating itself out of the movements of my hands despite the emotional turmoil. I felt like I was building a intense relationship with this single moment in time and with the baby on which the sculpture focused. Although I could not articulate it then, this profound felt relationship seemed to break through the evil, anonymity, and death opening into light, life, and purpose. I
noticed that it was only when I invited one of the other participants to see the sculpture, did I feel the beginnings of an emerging calm and the purpose fulfilled.

The power of this experience continued. On a brief visit to Vancouver, my mother spent some time looking at my photographs and assisted me in recording them digitally. Upon returning to her home in another province, she began to have nightmares about the baby in the archival photograph. When she called me about three weeks later, she told me that she would wake up in the morning and the image of the baby would be the first thing that came into her mind. She requested that I send her a copy of the photograph so that she could process it more deeply for herself. This was an amazing experience of the impact of shared vicarious witnessing.

The symbolic representation of the sculptures tells the story of my experience of vicariously witnessing this trauma far better than I could ever tell with word symbols. I ask that you spend a moment with these photographs. As you look at the images, take note of any perceptions, thoughts, or derived meanings that emerge as you witness.
Figure 2. Archival photograph inspiring sculptural artwork (Digitally reproduced from Swiebocka, T. (1993). *Auschwitz: A history in photographs*. Oswiecim, Poland: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum)
Figure 3. Sculpture in plaster created by Patrice Keats (2003), Title: The Veil of Anguish.
Figure 4. Sculpture in plaster II created by Patrice Keats (2003), Title: *Restitution*. 

Sculpture in Plaster II
Information Session: The Bearing Witness Retreat in Auschwitz-Birkenau

The sites of this research include four concentration and extermination camps--Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sachsenhausen, and Treblinka. These sites offer a myriad of opportunities to vicariously witness trauma through a variety of narratives, artifacts, films, photographic images, archival documents, memorials, and structural remnants in the camps sites. Specifically, this information session focuses on the Bearing Witness Retreat which takes place in the Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. Through the information in this session, you will be able to construct an image of the Retreat so as to understand the context of this study.

The Retreat began through the initiative of Bernie Glassman (1998). Although Mr. Glassman was born and raised in a Jewish family, he currently identifies himself as a Buddhist and leads a Buddhist-based community called the Peacemaker Community. In 1994, he visited Auschwitz for the first time where he prepared for, and performed a ceremony that gave a new member of the Peacemaker Community his peacemaker vows.

Having performed the ceremony on the steps of the shattered Birkenau crematorium VI, he was so moved by his experience that he endeavored to create the Bearing Witness Retreat as a way of recognizing and honouring the millions of people murdered at this site during World War II. His vision was for people of all cultures and religions to join in the common purpose of engendering peace at the site of one of the world’s greatest massacres of civilians. Thus, in 1996 the first Bearing Witness Retreat took place. There were approximately 150 people with a multitude of religious backgrounds (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism) from around the world including North America, Europe, and Israel. Since that time, the Bearing Witness Retreat has taken place near the American Thanksgiving festival each year (see Appendix A).

The Retreat begins with a tour of Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter of Krakow in southern Poland. From there, the group travels to Oswiecim (Polish) or Auschwitz (German). Participants are introduced to the Auschwitz camp by watching a film of the Russian liberation of Auschwitz. For an overview of the camps, guided tours of both Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau take place on the first day. For the next five days participants are free to explore parts of the camp not covered in the tour, visit the museum in Auschwitz, participate in silence mediation at the Birkenau selection site, memorial services at the crematorium sites, and religious services conducted by leaders from the various world and indigenous traditions present. The Retreat offers small and large group meetings on a daily basis for participants to
share experiences and express their feelings and thoughts. These groups are facilitated by clergy members, Buddhist teachers, and therapists.

Autobiographic reports written by Retreat participants carry striking features. Participants reported such struggles as grasping the shocking brutality of the Holocaust story, experiencing feelings of guilt and shame, and noticing tensions between people about appropriate behaviour of participants (Cunningham, 1996). One example of personal tension involved people laughing in the hallway of the Auschwitz Museum. One of the participants was very affronted by this behaviour and expressed to Mr. Glassman that people “didn’t understand where they were,” and that “Auschwitz was impossible” (Glassman, 1998, p. 9). From these documents, it is clear that people enter the witnessing experience from different perspectives and struggle to understand and make sense of the experience in many different ways.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

This session ends our second day. As I mentioned this morning, we will have folk dancing in the main building tonight. Dinner will be served at 6:30 pm--I will see you there!

Day Three

Good morning, everyone! As we gather our belongings on this final morning and get ready to part, I want to thank everyone for giving me this opportunity to have joined you in such a wonderful and informative conference. Through the course of talks and discussions, I have been able to situate myself among you and learn from your vast experience in the field. I will offer the closing keynote address to conclude our work together.

Closing Keynote: Situating Myself: Integrating Witnessing and Narrative Perspectives

I ascertain that the features in each of the witnessing discourse topics point to a witnessing process that encompasses a complex and dynamic relationship between firsthand witness survivors and vicarious witnesses. The witnessing process involves these two types of witnesses (tellers and listener/observers) who are full participants in pursuit of, or pursued by, a traumatic event. The struggle to understand and make meaning of the trauma involves close communication and commitment for both. In this voluntary and compassionate relationship, something vital and indispensable is touched that may allow resolution, reintegration, and reconnection. One type of witness mirrors the other in a parallel process of meaning-making, reflexivity, transformation, and change. Through verbal and nonverbal language, physicality, and proximity, a personal and political alliance may form out of the sacred space between them. This alliance is a social power that can act to influences the norms, ethics, and values of
society. Due to the dynamics of telling, listening, re-telling, seeing, re-telling, imagining human compassion and hope may be born.

Vicarious witnesses carry a responsibility to listen and act on behalf of survivors. The community may call on them to remember and re-tell a witnessed testimony in the context of political action. In this way, they act as historians remembering events or testimony that they understand through participating in dialogue, performance, or literature. Further, vicarious witnesses risk secondary traumatization in the process of hearing trauma testimony. Consequently, they may need an opportunity to prepare before the witnessing experience and accessibility to witnessing peers after their participation.

Firsthand witness survivors need to tell about their experiences of trauma events. In the telling, they testify to both the mind and body of the vicarious witness while representing aspects of truth, resistance, and freedom. In so doing, they may reclaim a lost and shattered self within the dynamics of a witnessing relationship. Essentially, the shared language of witnessing opens the door for the survivor to speak to a community of people who are willing to hear the trauma story. When vicarious witnesses listen, believe, and remember the essential meaning of the testimony, the firsthand witness survivor may feel understood, accepted, and vindicated.

The gap in my understanding lies in the experience of the vicarious witness. It is through the promise of narrative methods that I find possible meanings of their experience while vicariously witnessing in the concentration and extermination camps of Europe.

Thank you for attending my conference. I hope we will meet again!
CHAPTER THREE
Narrative Methods: Ways to Understand Vicarious Witnessing

As a researcher, I seek to understand possible meanings expressed in the various narrative texts offered to me by witnesses who chose to share their lived experiences of vicarious witnessing in the concentration camps of Europe. This narrative inquiry called for a continuous negotiation between the storytellers and I as we moved together through the various chapters of the research process, such as our initial contact, negotiating about field experiences, participating in actual field experiences, as well as constructing and interpreting field texts. Here, I outline and record the process of negotiating, constructing, and interpreting the narrative texts utilized in this inquiry.

Using a Narrative Approach

In a postmodern context truth claims, universality, singularity, privilege, and authority are called into question. Philosophers see knowledge as partial, historical, and locally situated. As Laurel Richardson (2000) points out, the key word is doubt—doubt that "any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (p. 928). The boundaries of standard research methods begin to unravel and shift with new ways of thinking about and approaching research questions. From a constructivist viewpoint, knowing and understanding in a context-dependent world takes place by interpreting, translating, and arranging experiences into linguistically accessible and evolving constructs. Languaged interpretation and meaning construction facilitates coming to know human experience in situated contexts.

With this dependence on language in coming to know, I am interested in the stories people tell about their experiences. I believe that stories represent the actions of living. I am, and am within, a network of stories that intermingle, interact, enlighten, inform, and interfere. Stories are the text and context of experience. As a form of inquiry, immersing myself in the nature of stories through narrative methods provides me with a venue for working with the shifting aspects of personal lived experience, subjectivity, dialogical processes, situated contexts, and meaning perspectives. As I read, listen to, and experience the stories of others, I recognize that my understanding is limited by my own subjectivity and the margins around how I language the dialogue within the context of my inquiry. It is only possible for me to come to a limited understanding rather than make a truth-claim about vicarious witnessing; it can never be anything but a proposal founded on the interpreted processes of storying.
Narrative Research Methods

Methods of narrative research have been many and varied. From models that privilege temporal ordering and narrative structure to those that privilege function and context (see Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Mishler, 1995), diversity is the norm. With current postmodern perspectives that locate language and language use within locally situated cultural contexts it is difficult for me as a researcher to fit my field texts into a standardized model.

In light of this struggle, I appreciate the ideas and guidance of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who believe that narrative researchers should, in the purest sense, inquire and interpret narratively. I understand this to mean that the researcher begins with “the experience as lived and told in stories” (p. 128), setting aside definitions and procedures that pre-determine the course of analysis. As in the narrative construction of knowing, storying the research experience is just as ambiguous and as complex a process. Their view is for narrative researchers to situate themselves within the three-dimensional space of the research landscape that includes aspects of temporal continuity (past, present, future), personal and social interaction, and situated context. In this three-dimensional space, the inquirer and the inquiry is free to move in any or all of four directions—*inward* to conditions such as feelings, hopes, and values; *outward* to existential conditions within the environment; *backward* to past experiences; and *forward* to present-centred and future conditions. They believe that research into human experience means to experience it simultaneously in these four directions. Further, these researchers give no clear logical stepwise directions for interpretive analysis, suggesting only that the researcher is in a continuous process of interpretation from the initial creation of field texts including the transcription of interviews, to the reading, rereading, archiving, and coding that precedes the construction of research texts. I align myself with this belief in the narrative creation of the research process. In the context of my study, I am happy to live in the flux, as I believe that the final text will emerge from a very creative process of exploration.

As I explored the process of narrative knowing and emergent knowledge in my inquiry, I strove to develop an appropriate analysis of the field texts constructed in the research process. Because each participant offered me three types of texts—written, spoken, and visual—it was important for me to understand the meaning in and between all texts. In the following section, I outline the two levels of narrative analysis—*interpretive readings* and *narrative instances* (see Table 1, p. 52)—that I constructed as a path to understanding the vicarious witnessing experience of the participants.
Table 1
Method of Analysis for Vicarious Witnessing Field Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Analysis</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Type of Text Analyzed</th>
<th>Interpretative Representations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Readings</td>
<td>General Reading</td>
<td>Written/Spoken/Visual</td>
<td>Individual Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific Reading</td>
<td>Written/Spoken</td>
<td>Collective Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual Reading</td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational Reading</td>
<td>Written/Spoken/Visual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Instances</td>
<td>Single-Text</td>
<td>Visual--Self of Narrator and Focus of Attention</td>
<td>Pictorial Metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intratextual</td>
<td>Visual/Written</td>
<td>Visual Collage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intertextual</td>
<td>Spoken--Bearing Witness</td>
<td>Group Dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretive Readings**

I was particularly interested in the typology proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998). They define four types of interpretive models—holistic-content (story content considered holistically looking at both explicit and implicit meaning), holistic-form (content considered in terms of formal aspects of story structure such as plot development over time), categorical-content (specific segments of story content are counted and categorized into researcher-defined categories such as creating a subtext by identifying sections relevant to the research question), and categorical-form (characteristics of style or language use are counted and categorized into defined categories such as frequency of passive utterances). In reviewing these four models, the first two steps for reading holistic content were of interest to me as an initial general reading in my own study. Of these two steps, the first required an overall reading of the whole text where the meaning in the text could “speak” (p. 62), and the second involved a process of recording initial and global impressions including any unusual features or aspects of interest.

To address the three types of field texts more specifically, I valued the ideas outlined by Bal (1997). She described different aspects or parts of stories that narrators use when trying to convey to the reader, viewer, or listener the meaning of their story. Specifically, Bal considers...
the narrator as central to a narrative text. She asserts that the narrator's identity, perspective, and choices construct the texts in particular ways. For example, she sees the narrator ordering events in specific ways, taking reflexive pauses as stories are told, describing certain contexts and not others, and attending to key issues of personal importance. All of these parts of the story assist the reader, viewer, or listener in understanding the meaning that the narrator is trying to convey. Thus, from Bal's ideas, I designed a specific reading for the parts of the participant's spoken and written texts, and a visual reading for similar parts of the visual texts.

Without losing the holistic aspect of all three texts for the participant, I end the interpretive reading analysis with a relational reading. In this reading, I noted relationships and differences between the various field texts as parts of the participant's multiperspectival story. As a structure to look at meaning, I constructed some guiding questions in each of the four readings (see Table 2, p. 67).

Narrative Instances

Many researchers point to a dialectical means of interpreting a narrative. Mishler (1986) points to a two-level model where we understand stories through "what" is told (content) and "how" it is told (form). Adding the holistic dimension, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) believe that researchers may interpret the whole narrative either explicitly at face value or by using the framework of a preconceived theory or underlying assumptions to search for implicit content clues, symbols, or gaps that point to meaning. Similarly, Geanellos (2000) points to two levels of interpretation--the expressed and unexpressed. In interpreting the expressed, the researcher looks at the whole to understand the parts for an explanation of the content. When looking for the unexpressed, the researcher focuses on the parts, in relationship to the whole, as a way of grasping meaning in the text. She believes that the researcher needs to interpret both in order to understand the movement or flow between the parts and the whole. Polkinghorne (1988), refers to this hermeneutic reasoning (i.e., moving between the parts and the whole) as the only way that one can attempt to understand a narrative text.

I am very interested in the process of knowing that arises from the tensions of these dualistic aspects of interpreting narrative texts--the content and form, explicit and implicit, the expressed and unexpressed, and the general and the particular. However, the interactive space between these dualities where the meaning of their relationships exist is what I can not grasp. I want the freedom to stand at, and look from the various in-between space within and among the diverse texts that were constructed by each person, rather than grasping for meaning blindly at the outside extremes. In this way, I was particularly intrigued by Denzin's (Denzin & Lincoln,
2000) interest in an idea from the area of conversational analysis. He pointed to Psathas who proposes the use of a “method of instances” (cited in Denzin, 1997, p. 245) where for example, “an utterance intersects with another utterance, giving rise to an instance of the system in action” (p. 371). Psathas examines the features and structures of the instance to understand how the occurrence is organized. Questions about the meaning of an action always goes back to the course of interactions and the consequences that result from it. Denzin explains that each analysis of an instance is fitted specifically to the case itself, which is “uniquely adequate” for that particular phenomenon. Using this idea as a model for my inquiry, I see the analysis of narrative instances (see Table 1) as a method that involves the exploration of how one part of a narrative text, or one type of narrative text, intersects with another, giving rise to an instance of the experience of vicarious witnessing in action. Here, no narrative text represents the other, but rather they may share a similarity in content or form. Because each participant in my study constructed three separate texts based on coming to know about their experiences through written, spoken, and visual processes, the interaction of these parts of the participant’s texts needs to be taken into consideration to understand how they made sense of their vicarious witnessing experience. Each perspective or point of view shapes the meaning that the participant attempts to express, yet the meaning lives in the relationships between these perceptual parts of awareness. As described in the second chapter, Polkinghorne (1988) outlined specific kinds of relationships between things that construct meaning (e.g., one thing being the same as another, one thing being an instance of another, one thing being the cause of another). Whether spoken, written, or visual, the parts of a story function to render meaning to human experience (Bruner, 1990). Finally, each analysis of a narrative instance is matched specifically to each participant and I believe, is uniquely adequate for the experience of vicarious witnessing.

Although it is impossible to explore all narrative instances, there are a multitude of possibilities within and between texts. In the process of my inquiry, I selected and marked specific narrative instances to explore as a second means of interpreting the field texts available to me; my choice was based on aspects that I found interesting within and among the texts.

There are multiple dimensions where it is possible to explore narrative instances within stories and between texts. First, I can explore single-text narrative instances between the parts of one participant’s story. For example, there may be interactions between two parts of a written story such as temporal elements and the narrator’s perspective. If the narrator views a current experience from the perspective of the past, she may have frequent temporal pauses in
her story where no time passes or movement occurs. These pauses may involve reflexive moments that serve to process current vicarious witnessing experiences in light of past struggles.

Second, *intratextual* narrative instances can be explored between the parts of the three different kinds of narrative texts (i.e., spoken, written, or visual) each participant constructed or co-constructed. For example, the parts of the total collection of a participant’s texts may include a personal journal, photographs, interview texts, and other artifacts. If the narrator has a consistent focus of attention on the social group dynamics in one text, and a large majority of photographs of the group in the visual text, an interesting interaction arises between the two texts.

Last, *intertextual* narrative instances can be explored between the perspectives of the various people who are individual parts of the collective or shared story of the group. As Denzin (1997) explains, “every text is a multiplicity of other texts existing within a network of intertextual relations” (p.234). For example, cultural perspectives of one participant may differ drastically from another. This may be reflected in a very different experience and personal meaning of the same event.

I further expand and outline my process in this interpretive method in the section below. However, I begin by setting the stage through an introduction to the research setting, the participant group, and our construction of different types of field texts. Second, I outline the interpretive process of analyzing the field texts including archival processes, transcription, and course of analysis. Finally, I summarize my views of coming to a research text which includes issues around understanding and evaluative criteria.

*Setting: European Concentration Camps*

The events of interest in this inquiry—experiences of vicarious witnessing—takes place in a wide range of settings. When I first proposed my study, I intended to explore the witnessing process in two very diverse settings that would offer me the possibility of obtaining a rich mix of people, interactions, and a variety of vicarious witnessing experiences. One was a three-day Therapeutic Enactment weekend and the other was a weeklong tour of the concentration camps in Oswiecim, Poland with the Bearing Witnessing Retreat. As an initial exploration into vicarious witnessing experiences, I hoped that witnessing in one context would inform and expand the other. With my proposal accepted, I conducted and transcribed pre-witnessing interviews with four witnesses attending the Therapeutic Enactment weekend. I joined them in participating in the workshop weekend, constructing descriptive fieldnotes and a
personal journal. At the completion of the weekend, I conducted and transcribed post-witnessing interviews. I then set these research texts aside and prepared to leave for Europe with four other participants destined for the Bearing Witness Retreat in Poland.

From the beginning, the group seeking to attend the Bearing Witness Retreat developed very distinct characteristics due to the nature and destination of our travel. Witnesses wanted to share information and resources, jointly plan a travel itinerary, organize common accommodation, and build a supportive group as a resource for coping with the experiences to come. Due to this close association, group members jointly decided to expand the setting by visiting two other concentration and extermination camps before arriving at the Auschwitz-Birkenau site. The Sachsenhausen concentration camp, the memorial to the extermination camp of Treblinka, and the Bearing Witness Retreat at the Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau camps were all publicly accessible sites. Indeed, the combination of sites opened up the possibilities for an intense vicarious witnessing experience. As one of the witnesses stated, “Looking back, the journey from Sachsenhausen to Treblinka to Auschwitz to Birkenau was cumulative, each place worse and more powerful in its reality than the one before.”

These sites offered a variety of opportunities for participants to vicariously witness trauma through reading, listening, and observing. For example, witnesses read about trauma in displayed historical documents, personal vignettes in the museums, and books that dealt with survivor accounts. They also listened to trauma narratives told directly by the Bearing Witness Retreat participants and tour guides, as well as through audio-recording of survivors. Witnesses observed artifacts of traumatic experiences such as archival photographs and films, prisoner representations through art, personal effects (e.g., hair, hairbrushes, shoes, eyeglasses, artificial limbs, baby clothes), prison quarters, gas chambers, and crematoria. Finally, on a minute scale witnesses experienced similar stressful situations to camp prisoners such as sitting for hours in the cold, standing in crowded prison barracks, vicariously witnessing trauma for days, and carrying their own bowl with which to receive a daily meal.

Undeniably, the opportunities for vicariously witnessing trauma in the concentration camps were so great that the amount of field texts constructed by myself and the other witnesses were considerable. On the advice of my research committee, I decided to focus solely on the field texts constructed around the concentration camp sites as the Therapeutic Enactment site would be dwarfed in comparison. Hence, I draw from this single site for my interpretation of the vicarious witnessing experience.
Vicarious Witnessing Participants

Based on my constructivist perspective, I maintain that there is no such thing as a neutral-observer position in research. Specifically, I believe that deeply understanding the meaning of a lived experience can only happen by participating in it myself. This is congruent with how life is actually lived. Thus, I took a participant-inquirer standpoint in the witnessing process of this inquiry. By taking this position, I developed peer relationships based on a foundation of collaboration and respect through openly discussing the possible benefits and difficulties of my positioning in our initial interview. In this way, we attempted to intercept any problems that might arise during our travels. Peer relationships allowed me to hear the witnesses speaking the witnessing discourse. Further, I benefited from spontaneous dialogue in the research setting. Additionally, I felt the full impact of the witnessing experience and was able to empathize with the witness’s struggles to construct meaning and understanding of the experience. Hence, in the information below, I included my own profile so as to give an honest picture of the whole witnessing group.

At the outset of my inquiry, I was seeking a self-selected group of participants who had voluntarily chosen to enroll in the Bearing Witness Retreat. I was interested in adult participants with diverse backgrounds. Due to the international membership in this Retreat, I made every effort to draw from participants who lived in the Vancouver area. I advertised my inquiry through word-of-mouth, personal contacts, and advertisements submitted to administrators with the Vancouver Holocaust Society at the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre, and the Bearing Witness Retreat. My invitation to participate was answered by one person from the Vancouver Holocaust Society and six others from word-of-mouth information. The one person who contacted me through the Vancouver Holocaust Society agreed to participate immediately. Of the six who responded to word-of-mouth information, four committed to participate in my study and two decided to join the group but declined sharing their experience in the context of my research. This meant that five people signed a consent to participate; six as a total, including myself. Less than a month before our departure, one of the five participants withdrew from the study due to personal reasons that precluded her from traveling. This left myself and four other witnesses.

Of the five who consented to share their vicarious witnessing experiences, one was a man and four were women, ranging between the ages of 45 and 65. The witnesses were highly educated individuals, all holding graduate degrees at the Master’s and Doctoral levels. I was the only full-time student, while the other four individuals held jobs in a variety of professional
disciplines—one full-time and three on a part-time basis including one in semi-retirement. Professional expertise among the group included nursing, psychology, and architecture. Group members were also culturally diverse including one individual who immigrated from Europe, another whose parent immigrated from Poland before her birth, and three others who were born and raised in both eastern and western Canadian cities. Finally, one witness had no religious affiliation, one followed Christian traditions, two were born and raised in the Jewish tradition, and one converted to Judaism in adulthood.

As mentioned in the previous section, this group of witnesses was unique. Word-of-mouth information about my project spread among a small group of people who were friends or associates of each other; they all wished to attend the Bearing Witness Retreat with only two of them participating in this project. This group of four wanted to travel together and create a safe and supportive group in which to share their witnessing experiences. They also desired to meet the other participants in order to exchange information, arrange joint transportation, organize accommodation, and build relationships. Participants outside of this sub-group were also interested in meeting; I made arrangements for a gathering. It was at that point that I entered into a truly collaborative relationship with the members of my participant group. Incorporating the expertise in the group, I endeavored to work together with them to shape our field experience. The relational distance between them as participants, and me as researcher became almost none existent. As a peer, I moved into an egalitarian partnership, negotiating my role at any given time based on a human relational rather than a research paradigm.

During our full group meeting, we discussed reasons for our participation in the Retreat, resources that were helpful, and travel arrangements. Two participants invited the group to their different places of worship (i.e., synagogue and church) to receive blessings, prayers, and well wishes for our journey. We ended our meeting with a close circle that confirmed ourselves as a supportive unit as we prepared to venture into the trauma of the concentration camps.
Throughout the course of our travel and subsequent meetings we remained, and still remain, a group of supportive members.

Co-construction and collaboration was the norm in our group of witnesses. As an example, about two weeks after our return from Europe, we met as a group to reconnect and talk about our common interest in taking some kind of action that would benefit the community. In our discussion, we decided to meet again and discuss the possibilities of a public presentation or performance. In the subsequent meeting, members agreed that they would like to be involved in a performance presentation and were pleased when I offered to
write a script that reflected our experiences from the field texts that I gathered during the research process. I wrote a dramatic reading that group members unanimously accepted and in which they consented to participate (see Appendix B). We then accepted an invitation from an organization involved in social justice to present our dramatic reading (see chapter four for more details). Consequently, we worked together in varying degrees and performed our dramatic reading during Racism Awareness Month (March) of this year.

As we struggled through the difficulty of being confronted with the terror of the concentration camps and the subsequent effort to make sense of our experiences, we moved as a unified whole. Within this whole, we also held a self-as-expert position (Hermans, 1992). From that position, we were actors that used our own voices, language, nuances, and insights to construct and speak about our own unique perspective of living the experience of vicarious witnessing. We were each active contributors and accomplices in the process of coming to understand the experience. Without question, each participant was personally invested in searching with me to understanding and articulate the vicarious witnessing experience.

*Constructing Field Texts in the Witnessing Process*

Narrative texts are defined as a finite structured whole of symbols in which a narrator tells a story in a particular medium (e.g., words, imagery, sound, drama, or any combination of these). The meaning contained in these texts is not bound within the symbolic medium, yet the narrative takes on a finite form that is enclosed by a first and last word, image, movement, or note. In this inquiry, I endeavored to construct narrative texts that included the processes of writing, speaking, and imaging--three distinct ways of knowing and expressing lived experience. The texts included personal journal entries, descriptive field notes, photographs, and artifacts. These texts are the data of qualitative researchers. When referring to the narrative texts constructed to represent aspects of field experience I prefer the term field texts as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1994). Further, the usual idea of collecting these texts, as if they were already there, is replaced by constructing texts that are extensions of and interactions with the vicarious witnessing experience. Thus, my witnessing participants and I constructed a variety of field texts in order to get as many different perspectives of the witnessing experience as possible during our field experiences. We constructed a variety of field texts--interview and conversational texts, descriptive fieldnotes, personal journals, records of personally relevant stories, photography, and collected artifacts. Each of these texts is unique and carries its own value in the inquiry. In describing each, I referred to ideas from Clandinin and Connelly (1994), and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995).
Descriptive Fieldnotes

Descriptive fieldnotes were constructed to paint a word picture of concrete sensory details that I noticed when I witnessed scenes, camp settings, objects, people, and actions. My descriptions included concrete details rather than generalizations, and sensory images rather than evaluative labels. I wrote descriptions in the text from a specific point of view with a specific purpose. For example, the purpose of my fieldnotes in Birkenau were to document my sensory impressions of the site in order to assist me in locating participant's experiences and in understanding subsequent actions that took place in that particular context. One entry reads, "I went into the women's barrack alone this morning; it is one of about 30 barracks in this particular area. It was located on the outside row of brick-structured barracks on the western side of the Birkenau camp. The entry door was ornate, with a simple brass handle. When I opened the door, I noticed a musty smell which hung in the dank still air. I stepped onto a slightly raised wood-slat entry way that connected two tiny rooms on either side. In the room on the left, a small dilapidated coal stove stood in the corner. There appeared to be just enough room for one person to sit comfortably on a chair. I assume it is a guard’s quarters. The room on the other side is similarly built but contained no stove. I stepped down from the raised entryway, onto a floor that was made of broken aged brick placed directly into the well-packed mud. The small area I stood in was open with partial brick walls on the north and south side; it was about the size of a very small living room. On the far west wall three-leveled shelving was roughly built; this served as one of the areas for women prisoners to sleep. This shelving spread across the 50 meter length of the barrack wall; the shelves were about a meter and a half in depth. The corridors on either side of the dividing walls lead down through the barracks. I walked slowly down one of the corridors breathing in the heaviness of the air. There were poorly mortared brick walls that divided the two meter sections of the rough and uneven wood shelving--about 25 single sections in the outside rows, and 25 on either side of the inside section that ran down the centre of the building. That made a total of about 100 units with 3 levels each--300 shelves. From documents in the Auschwitz museum, Nazis sometimes housed up to five adults on each shelf. This number would allow over one thousand people per barrack. My immediate impression was a sense of horror and shock. It was stark, harsh, very cold and dark. I could hear the thin sheets of glass that filled the windows rattle in the wind."

Personal Journals

This particular field text was my most frequently used text. It offered me an opportunity to write reflexively about myself and my experience in the process of the inquiry. These
reflexive thoughts included ruminations, reflections, insights, personal interpretations, and reactions to the witnessing experience. This journal was a place to make notes about interactions, dialogues, critical incidents, hypotheses, and ideas.

I offered a personal journal to all of the other participants in my study. I presented the journal as a way of tracking their witnessing experiences and as tool to record their stories and images. All witnessing participants agreed to write about their experiences in a journal. Two participants made daily entries and submitted the journal to me when we had our post-witnessing interview. One participant found the recording process difficult to keep up with in the activity-filled days of the journey. Instead of a journal, this participant offered a retrospective account that was written upon returning to Vancouver. Another participant wrote diligently in the journal and transferred the information gathered into the form of a long type-written letter, of which I received a copy.

As a reference for recording their experiences I included these instructions, which I attached to the first page of their journal:

"As a guide to journaling the story of your *experiences* during the witnessing event, you may include tracking:

- What and how you are thinking (e.g., insights, ideas, repetitive thoughts, comforting self-statements, hopes, understandings, meaning)
- Any emotional experiences that you may have (e.g., excitement, apprehension, elation, neutrality, fear, disgust, sorrow, pleasure) noting any patterns or consistency as you are witnessing
- Any physical reactions that you notice and the context in which you notice them (e.g., calming or grounding activities, restlessness, loss of appetite, increased fatigue)
- You may also want to describe aspects of the actual event site, sensory images, or meetings with people (noting exceptional attributes, important dialogues, and distinctive actions) that you found to be important, interesting, or difficult for you
- Other experiential aspects that may include strong dream images, important stories that you hear, objects that impact your experience (e.g., photographs, displays), symbols of interest, patterns of any kind that you notice, and artifacts that you may have gathered (e.g., memorabilia, postcards, art objects)
You may also want to record your experience through drawings, poetry, photography, or any other means that conveys the meaning of your experience.”

Participants told me that these guidelines were very useful in helping them expand their consciousness about their experiences. One participant noted, “This way of thinking makes it a deeper, richer experience for me.”

**Photographs and Artifacts**

As an expressive therapist, I am aware of the powerful story that images can tell of lived experience; another way of knowing from a different part of the self. Writers such as Timothy Adams (1994) and Susanna Egan (1994) write about the use of photography as first-person accounts in autobiographic texts. Both authors write about the subjective power that the lens holds to reveal the unseen in the self of a person; a surprising reflection of a life view. In the context of my study, I encouraged participants to use photography as a means of recording their experiences by offering each person a small disposable 35mm camera. I requested that they use the camera to take pictures of people, places, and things which represented important aspects of their experiences or aspects that were beyond words. On our return, each person gave me their camera and I made double sets of the prints. During the second interview, I gave each witness a set of their prints and kept a set for my records. Witnesses picked out the ones that were most important to them and told a brief story about those images and how they reflected their vicarious witnessing experience. For example, one photograph that a witness took was a direct, straight-on view of the birch forest in Birkenau. The trees took up the whole space within the frame, with a slight view of the sky and earth. She related the forest to many aspects of her experience--her own childhood memories of the sadness evoked by the changing seasons, the forest as a hiding place for escaped prisoners, and a place where women and children awaited their death in the gas chambers of Birkenau. Starting with the story of personal feelings that trees evoked in her throughout her life, followed by a description of what happened to people in those trees, represented an important aspect of her experience. She expressed a deep melancholy related to the cycle of death in the seasons and tacitly linked it to the death of millions of people. She concluded our discussion of the photograph saying, “I don’t know if I can ever look at a birch forest the same way again.”

Artifacts collected by witnesses were comprised of a variety of items that could trigger the memories of their experiences in the camps and in other related areas (e.g., transportation, accommodation, museums). They were fragments that participant told stories around; another perspective from which to tell their story. Some items increased the possibility of exploring the
multiple voices of witnessing, the expression of power or resistance in the camp setting, and witnessing relationships. For example, one witness brought home a whole brick collected from the children's barrack. The story the witness told related to the need for a large heavy object that could reflect the "bearing" aspect of witnessing in the camps. The brick represented a way for this witness to talk about the experience and share it with others using a symbol that went to the heart of Hitler's crime. Other artifacts gathered by participants included items such as postcards, brochures, maps, business cards, amber and amber jewelry, straw from the women's barracks, a plate fragment, a button from a prison uniform, a piece of cloth found in a barrack, small pieces of brick from the crematoria, and a small piece of wood from the railway in Birkenau.

**Interviews and Conversational Texts**

When I interviewed participants, I invited them into a conversational interaction. Denzin (cited in Silverman, 2001) describes this interaction as an observational encounter that "represents the coming together of two or more persons for the purpose of focused interaction" (p. 95). The essence of this focused interaction was to generate the construction of knowledge and understanding about the vicarious witnessing experiences through joint collaboration. In order to make the interaction process as dynamic as possible, I used simple, short, open-ended questions, which encouraged elaboration and clarification of meaning. In addition, I verified my interpretations and understanding by using sensitive and empathic reflections as witnesses told their stories and shared their experiences. This sense of collaboration with participants assisted me in clarifying how I was privileging the research text from my own viewpoint.

In order to add to the field texts which assisted me in constructing an interpretive answer to my research question, I conducted two semi-structured interviews and two informal conversational discussions. The semi-structured interviews with my participants took place both before and after our journey to the camps. The two informal conversational discussions took place with each participant as a follow up to the public performance we created and as an evaluative reflection on the interpreted text I constructed of their vicarious witnessing experience.

After an initial contact by phone, I arranged for the first interview. The function of this interview was to reiterate the purpose of my study, discuss the roles of researcher and the participant, obtain informed consent (see Appendix B), and interview the participants about their preparation and ideas about their forthcoming vicarious witnessing experience. Once I had informed consent for their participation in my study, I used a tape-recorder to document the
content of the interview. This was my standard procedure for recording interview content. The interview questions focused on discussions about storying their experiences (e.g., journaling, photography), describing their preparation process, their motivation for participation as a witness, and their expectations of the experience (see Appendix C).

The second interview took place within the first week of our arrival home. Subsequent to the first interview, I followed up on the witness’s articulated expectations, hopes, or wishes for comparison. The purpose for this second interview was to listen to how witnesses reflected on their immediate feeling and thoughts about the vicarious witnessing experience; to understand, construct, or negotiate meanings about their experiences in the concentration camps, and to learn about any future actions they planned (see Appendix C).

The two informal conversational discussions took place both by telephone and in-person. After a very intense frenzy of creative energy, the witnessing group performed the dramatic reading about our vicarious witnessing experience before an audience in a public setting. It was of interest to me to know how participating in and performing the piece in public affected the meaning of their witnessing experience, their views about group process, and their desire for future actions. The second conversation took place after witnesses read the interpretive stories I wrote about their vicarious witnessing experiences. In this conversation I was interested in their experience of verisimilitude, narrative truth about their lived experience, my use of language as reflecting their experience, and their sense of emotional intimacy with the text.

*From Field Texts to Research Texts*

Here, I outline the process of interpretive analysis. I describe how I archive field texts and proceed through my interpretative process through transcription and reading.

*Archiving Field Texts for Interpretation*

Because there were a number of field texts from each participant, I believe it is important to set up an archival system. In order to keep the documents easily retrievable, I set up a secure file box that holds all documents, photographs, and audiotapes. When I constructed or received a text, I immediately labeled it with the date and participant pseudonym or pseudonym initial. I set up a file folder for each participant which I labeled with a name at the top of the folder and a list of the documents placed on the front of the folder. Any artifacts that were not possible for me to store or access, I included in the file in either a photographed or photocopied format.
Creating and Interacting with Transcripts

As a first step into interpretive analysis, transcription of recorded semi-structured interviews begins the process. From the moment the interview ends, interpretation begins because, as Mishler (1986) asserts, transcripts can only partially represent speech. The transcript includes and excludes some features of speech—even audio and video recordings can only be partially representative of what happened. Hence, it was impossible for me to record all of the conversational events (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999) that unfolded and influenced the construction of the storied witnessing experience.

As an important aspect of story construction, the spoken interaction between a participant and myself was vital in coming to know and understand the personal witnessing experience. The interpretive process of transcription involved three aspects—reflexive listening, typing the conversation into a text, and re-listening and reviewing text accuracy. First, it was essential for me to spend time listening to the audio-tapes of my interviews for initial impressions of the participant’s experience. This listening took place immediately after the interview so that I could keep both the verbal and non-verbal impressions in my mind. I made reflexive notes in my personal journal about the interview process and content.

Second, I carefully transcribed the content of the interview including both the participant’s voice and my own. The transcription took place as soon as possible after the interviews so that I could recall the nonverbal aspects of the conversation that may have been important in the overall structure of the conversation. Considering the work of James Gee (1986, 1989, 1991, 1999), I was very interested in the poetic structure within the participant’s spoken word. Gee believes that the structure of speech reflects the personal, interrelational, and cultural aspects of people as they speak. In this way, I was careful to record the pauses, hesitations, stutters, sighs, interruptions, habitual phrases and utterances (e.g., you know, so, um, mhuh), and incomplete words and sentences. For example, in a pre-interview one participant spoke in alternating up and down inflections at the end of each break in this section. Starting with an up inflection the participant spoke in this manner (the underline represents the up inflection, the / indicates a break in flow and ... indicates a short pause), “so...I see that/as very much a journey/that we’re on/and...and/that the journey/has its own/internal consistency/and meaning/and steps/so its important/to follow them.” Although I did not mark all transcripts in this way, these aspects were very important as I constructed the interpretive story of each person’s vicarious witnessing experience because they reflected the process of how a person was piecing together different experiences into a narrative whole.
Finally, I re-listened to and reviewed my transcription of the interviews and recorded any aspects or impressions as part of my general reading of the narrative text. This process was extremely useful, as I noted a number of times where I changed key words in the first draft so that the participant’s meaning fit within the framework of my own understanding. I was aware that if I could not hear what the participant had said because of a soft voice or a bad recording, I blindly filled in the gap with my own interpretation. For example, on one first draft I transcribed, “I see that really/as a...um...ah...um...model/for my own experience,” and on the second draft, “I see that as really/a...um...ah...um...matter/of my own experience.”

**Interpretive Readings and Narrative Instances**

From the interpretive process of transcription, I entered deeper into the narrative analysis with four types of interpretive readings (see Table 2, p. 67) as described in the first part of this chapter. Additionally, I note and explore meaning through specific narrative instances. Below, I outline the readings with the specific purpose and process of each, and briefly outline my process of constructing narrative instances of vicarious witnessing.

**General reading of each text.** To begin, I record the number, specific narrative form (spoken, written, visual), and diversity of contributions (e.g., journals, visual, artifacts). From there, my purpose in the general reading of each field text is to construct a global sense of the texts and make note of any general first impressions. To do this, I perform an overall reading of each text and note the general tone, affect, focus of attention, and impression about how the participant tells or represent her/his stories (e.g., description, metaphorical, reflexive). Last, I note any general sense of meaning or significance that arises and any narrative instances that are of note.

**Specific reading of written and spoken texts.** For each of the written and spoken texts, my intention is to look at the parts of each story that contributes to shaping the meaning of the whole. I focus on six aspects of the story—self of the narrator, perspective, sequence, focus of attention, time, and context. In reading for the self of the narrator, I am interested in how the participant is reflected in the actions and interactions that take place in the story; this is the framework from which the story is told. Reading for the self of the narrator leads to exploring the participant’s perspective or point of view. The participant’s standpoint affects the focus of attention in the story and is dependent on complex factors such as psychological attitude and previous knowledge. Before moving into the focus of attention, I read for the sequence in which the participant tells the story. Here, I note the order of events, actions, and pauses. The sequence also indicates the psychological or aesthetic effects in the story-telling process. Once
### Guiding Questions for Interpretive Readings

#### 1. General Reading:
General impressions of all field text contributions from individual participants
- Number, type, and diversity of contributions (e.g., journals, visual, artifacts)
- General tone, affect, or focus of attention
- General impression about how the participant tells or represent stories (e.g., descriptions, amplification, metaphorical, reflexive)
- A general sense of the meaning or significance of the texts

#### 2. Specific Reading:

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<tr>
<th>ASPECTS OF STORIES</th>
<th>SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self of the Narrator</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self of the narrator</strong>—How does the narrator build his/her personal and cultural identity through relationships or responses to others? Where does the narrator stand in relation to the story (e.g., first-person, second-person perspective when speaking about the self)? <strong>Cultural perspectives</strong>—What cultural frameworks are expressed by the narrator? Stories preserve a culture—what cultural stories does the narrator tell? What is shared or not shared? How is the culture that is portrayed in the story bound in the language used? What cultural responsibility does the narrator hold in the story? <strong>Personal representations</strong>—What kind of complex symbols, metaphors, or references does the narrator use? What do they say about the narrator? <strong>Self as knowledge source</strong>—What does the narrator know or learn through self-analysis or reflexivity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The narrator is reflected in the actions and interactions that take place in the story. It is from this framework that the story is told.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Narrator Perspective</strong>—Is the perspective physical or psychological? How does this perspective influence the meaning of the story? How does the narrators’ memory affect the story? How might past traumas affect the narrators’ internal or external experience? <strong>Principle Issue</strong>—What is the narrator focused on in the text (e.g., social experiences, food, horrors)? What is the aim of this focus? What are the different ways that the focus is experienced (e.g., in dreams, fantasies, thoughts, feelings)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective is the point of view taken by the narrator. This perspective affects the focus of attention in the story. Perspective is dependant on complex factors such as psychological attitude and previous knowledge. Therefore, perspective or focus can be physical, psychological, or both.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Direction from the present</strong>—What multiple</td>
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The order requires the reader to pay attention to specific things and shows how events are told. This reflects the narrator's interpretation, expectation, and complexity. It also indicates the psychological or aesthetic effects in the story-telling process.

directions does the order of the story take (e.g. flashbacks or flashforwards from the present)? Describe.

**Distance from the present** - How far are events separated from the present (e.g., one week, one month, childhood period)?

**Gaps in the story** - Is there any indication of a lack of attention, missing element within the story? What can be deduced about an event, activity, or person that is omitted (e.g., too difficult to put into words, unfamiliarity)?

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<tr>
<th>Focus of Attention</th>
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<tr>
<td>A story is generally told about an experience of a person, place, object, or issue. This topic is interpreted by the way it is addressed and focused on in the telling. For example, the frequency with which an experience or set of experiences are repeated focuses the topic of story in a particular way.</td>
<td><strong>Attention focus</strong> - What is/are the single or diverse experiences that the narrator focuses on? <strong>Frequency</strong> - How often does the narrator present specific subjects? <strong>Presentation of experience</strong> - How does the author present a single experience using various presentations? How does the author present various experiences in one particular way?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>It is important to note the time the narrator gives to the different parts of the story, as well as the narrator's general sense of time.</td>
<td><strong>Time Summary</strong> - How does the narrator summarize periods of time? What is the relationship between a summary and possible difficult times such as a turning point, emphasis point, or decision in parts of the story? <strong>Pauses in time</strong> - What reflexive pauses are noted in the story (e.g., no time passing or no movement occurring)?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>Place or location in the story is usually seen and described from a particular point of perception. It involves the contextual aspects of the story.</td>
<td><strong>Place</strong> - What details does the narrator tell about the location of the story? What are some points of perception (e.g., feelings, thoughts, aesthetics)? <strong>Space</strong> - How does the narrator talk about inner and outer spaces that the context evokes? How does this tension create meaning? <strong>Perspective of the reader</strong> - How does reading or visually observing a place or cultural description allow me as reader or viewer to fill in the empty spaces (lack of information) with my imagination?</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3. Visual Reading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>How is the story focused and presented through this representation? How does the narrator steer the perspective through visual representation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>What and how are visual signifiers used by the author (e.g., tonality and colour, framing the image into the photographic space, movement captured, organization of the image, and viewpoint such as above, below, far left or right, central, distant, and close-up)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Style</td>
<td>How does the personal style of the image reflect cultural aspects of the story? What does this say about the narrator?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Visual representation of stories involves all the aspects of meaning-making mentioned above. Specifically, visual stories may be in the form of photographs, film, sculpture, paintings, music, drama, and dance. A visual story begins with a perspective that is culturally open and visible. The content of these stories involve visual rather than linguistic signifiers and are already an interpretation of the narrator. In visual stories, the distinction between the internal and external perspective is blurred.

4. Relational Reading: Relationships between Stories

- How does the visual representation correspond to the other stories presented by the narrator?
- What links or difference are noticed between stories?
  How does the narrator represent her/himself in the different stories?
I record the sequence, I am able to track the participant’s focus of attention. In this part, I am interested in what particularly draws the participant’s attention be it a person, place, object, or issue. It is important to note the way the participant addresses or focuses on it in the telling. Further, the frequency with which a participant focuses on an experience or set of experiences leads the story in a particular direction. This is especially important because I am interested in how often and when the participant focuses attention on the vicarious witnessing experience. Additionally, I am interested in noting the general sense of time that the narrator gives to different aspects of the story and the time frame around the story in general. Finally, the contextual aspects of the story (place or location) are usually seen and described from a person’s particular point of perception such as feelings, thoughts, or aesthetics.

*Visual reading of the visual texts.* The visual reading involves carefully observing photographs and any artifacts that participant’s offer for interpretation. Visual representations of stories involves all the aspects of meaning-making mentioned above. Specifically, visual stories may be in the form of photographs, sculptures, drawings, or objects such as plate fragments and buttons. A visual story begins with a perspective that reflects cultural beliefs and values. The content of these stories involve visual signifiers such as colour, perspective, line, and tone. These signifiers are already an interpretation of the narrator. In visual stories, the distinction between the internal and external perspective is blurred. In some way, I believe that a visual story can get closer to the meaning of experience, especially with experiences that are difficult to articulate with words. As part of this reading, it is important to note how the participant’s came to chose artifacts or frame a particular aspect within a photograph.

*Relational reading of all field texts.* In this reading, I am interested in the relationships between, and common meanings across the participant’s written, spoken, and visual stories about vicarious witnessing experiences. To begin this reading, I carry on from the visual reading and note how the visual representation corresponds to, adds to, detracts from, or interacts with the other stories presented by the participant.

*Narrative instances.* When doing the interpretive readings, I noted remarkable narrative instances that were of interest to me in terms of vicarious witnessing. The purpose of narrative instances is to explore of the interactions within specific parts of a single text (e.g., self-of-the-narrator and focus of attention), the interaction between texts in one participant’s collection (e.g., visual and written), and interactions between the same text of all participants in the group (e.g., spoken texts related to a specific topic). Having chosen one narrative instance on each of
these levels, I spent time exploring the connections and noting what arose as I read or viewed the texts.

From Interpretation to Representation

Understanding Vicarious Witnessing

John Shotter (1999) talks about explanation and explaining as belonging to physical sciences where there are pre-established standards of writing or talking about things to prove one's statements are true. In other words, explanation is about getting things right. When the researcher uses dialogue or narrative as a method for comprehending change that involves the meaning people make of their experiences—we replace explain with understand. I believe that we cannot solve human problems by explanation but rather by new ways of understanding what we already know; the lived activities and processes are central. In the realm of understanding, Gergen (1999) quotes a warning by Wittgenstein, “Try not to think of understanding as a ‘mental process’ at all. For that is the expression that confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstance do we say, ‘Now I know how to go on’” (p. 145).

Schwandt (2000) outlines the value of understanding as the domain of narrative texts. He states that understanding is interpretation because we are always “taking something as something” (p. 194). Understanding requires that we engage with our own biases as a beginning that will help us decide what we need to give up in order to understand the other. This will bring us into a participatory dialogue with what we do not understand. Schwandt suggests that understanding is what we produce in that dialogue, not reproduce through our analysis. The meaning we seek is always coming into being in the specific, yet changing context of understanding. Hence, understanding is not concretizing a meaning, but rather mutually negotiating the meaning in the act of interpretation. “To understand is always to understand differently” (p. 195). Schwandt believes that understanding is a practical experience of being in and of the world. The adventure of understanding is a growth in inner awareness that expands or extends our self-knowledge and experience.

This sense of adventure to expand the understanding of vicarious witnessing motivates me to represent my perceptions in a form that might open up the dialogue between people. It is my aim to represent my inquiry in a way that invites the reader to move into the heart of my understanding. I believe that there is no one right or standard way of representing an understanding; multiple perspectives allow different views of the same experience. As with my participants, I offer the reader both written and visual representations of my interpretive analysis in hopes of expanding the dialogue.
How does understanding as a goal of research fit into a criteria model for validity or credibility? For an answer, I consulted the ideas of Bochner (2000) who has strong words about the idea of “criteria.” He quotes Rorty, who believes that criteria are “temporary resting places constructed for specific utilitarian ends...a criterion...is a criterion because some social practice needs to block the road of inquiry, halt the regress of interpretations in order to get something done” (p. 269). Bochner thinks this makes criteria have a “restricted, limiting, regressive, thwarting, halting quality to them” (p. 269). He believes that the underlying subtext is a need to authorize or legitimate a standard that will ensure rationality rather than subjectivity. This makes it destructive to the heart of our work, especially for psychology, because we know that the “phenomenon we study is messy, complicated, uncertain, and soft” (p. 270).

From this position, I note the varied attempts by qualitative researchers to construct criteria that is more conducive to the work of our inquiries. Various researchers working from a constructivist paradigm suggest a variety of forms, from Lather’s (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 2000) ideas about “voluptuous” legitimation (authorizing feminine voices as they intersect with other feminine voices giving rise to multiple feminine versions of specific issues) to community-centred determinations of validity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Denzin (1997) suggests “new” criteria on which postmodern narratives should be based. Three of these criteria call on the reader of the research text to evaluate the text according to their own sense of emotional intimacy with the experiences about which they read, verisimilitude or the text’s ability to provide an opportunity for vicarious experience (generalizing subjectively from the experience of the person in the text to their own personal experience), and the reader coming to understand the meaning of the text through the multiple points of view offered in the text. I find these three criteria as being most suited to my inquiry from the perspective of the reader.

More importantly, the point of view that I privilege in the authorizing the legitimacy of this research text, is that of the witnessing participants in my project. After constructing an interpretation of their individual stories, I sought their opinions and feedback about my interpretations of their experiences. I was interested in their vision of the “narrative truth” constructed by the content and form of my narrative interpretations. Participants responded with some of the following comments: “I had complex and contrasting responses to my experience. I feel you captured the essence of what I said;” “This story is not just similar, it is my story. It was uncanny seeing myself there. You clearly captured the feelings I was going
through;” “I can’t believe how much the whole trip comes back as I read this. It is tremendously clear and crystalline. It’s confronting because my voice is so clear. It reminds me of the deeply personal part of the trip;” “I trust you with my story. I trust you with my life.”
CHAPTER FOUR

The Vicarious Witnesses: Their Individual Stories

The content of this project would be empty without the willingness of the witnesses who joined me in bearing the evidence of the horrors of the concentration camps in Germany and Poland. The accounts of their personal experiences stand as the knowledge and wisdom that is the heart of this inquiry.

Vicarious Witnessing Stories

While I read and re-read the three dimensional field texts—spoken through interview and conversational texts, written through journal entries and documents, and visually through photographs—I found myself living deeply into each person’s experience. I lived in the narrative instances and worked to construct the closest narrative truth as possible. Through my own narrative process, I compiled the meaning of the various field texts into a single story for each participant using the interpretive reading process. Each story is drawn into a structural form that reflects each witness’s process in constructing his or her experience. Further, I chose to represent each participant’s experience from a first-person perspective so that the reader might better engage in the story. For the reader to follow the narrative accounts, I introduce each story with a brief biographical sketch, an outline of the various reports offered by the witness, and a guideline as to how the reader might read through the compiled text.

Finally, after a conversation with the single male participant, he requested that I protect his identity by representing all individual stories from a female perspective. As this is not a gender based project and gender issues are not a part of the analysis, I agreed to respect his request and so have removed all identification with him as male in the following participants stories.

Here are their stories.
Meeting Sima was a pleasure for me. She is a highly educated semi-retired professional in her 60's, and a self-proclaimed "radical." Her openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks, remains a model for me to live by. Sima was born and raised in the Jewish tradition in a Canadian city. Her parents immigrated from Poland to Canada before she was born. Unfortunately, her mother's family remained in Poland and were murdered in the concentration camps during World War II. Sima's search for understanding the fate of her family during the Holocaust event took her to Germany and Poland a number of times. Her first experience of the extermination and concentration camps left her secondarily traumatized upon her return. Responding to an advertisement that I distributed with the Vancouver Holocaust Centre, Sima contacted me about participating in my research. She currently understands her desire to return to Europe with the witnessing group as a "hope of coming together as a strategy to eliminate racism."

I conducted two interviews and two conversational dialogues with Sima. The interviews took place before leaving Vancouver for the Bearing Witness Retreat and one after our return. Our conversational dialogues took place after the performance of our collective story, and upon my completion of her interpretive text. She offered me her personal travel journal, as well as a set of photographs taken specifically for the study. We were involved in numerous informal conversations together, especially during the process of creating the witnessing performance.

I wrote Sima's story in the form of journal entries as she constructed her experience in a fairly organized and systematic fashion. Sima planned her experience carefully, as she had a number of personal goals that she wanted to achieve during the trip (e.g., creating a photographic record of the journey as a forum for social justice education, learning about Holocaust and racism education from camp directors). The journal form best represents Sima's well-thought out planning, careful record-keeping, reflective thoughts, and single-minded determination to fight for change.

Here is Sima's story.
What really turns me on is talking about and doing socially oriented action; the most important thing in my life is action against the oppression of racism. Specifically, I have a strong connection with witnessing the catastrophic remains of European concentration camps because Nazis murdered members of my family in those camps. As a vicarious witness, I feel a strong social responsibility to let people know what happened in the camps so that this kind of cataclysmic genocide and mass murder might never happen again. An important means of delivering the message for me is through the art of photography. I have a large collection of photographic slides that I have formed into a number of slide shows of the camps and memorial sites in Germany and Poland. I present these shows as often as I can without charge so that I can deliver the message through this provocative medium. Because I am more of a visual rather than a verbal person, it is difficult for me inwardly to turn the feelings I have about my experience into words. Nonetheless, as I share some excerpts out of my travel journal, the ideas of social action and my own sense of the collective experience interweave with the difficult task of witnessing the camps in Germany and Poland and vicariously witnessing the trauma.

October 23

When I returned from my solo trip to Auschwitz two years ago, I had an incredible case of post-traumatic stress. When I heard about the Bearing Witness Retreat this summer, I thought it would be a way to revisit the camp in a very different circumstance. I need to feel a sense of hope and strength because when I went on my first trip I was by myself—there were no rituals, no structure, and no sense of attempting to heal anything. I never had the opportunity to debrief or work through what I saw and experienced.

Even though I am not a religious person at all, nor do I value ritual that much, I hope that maybe I can experience a healing effect by getting into the rituals and discussions presented at the Retreat. I am also curious to find out what goes on in the Retreat and if I might come out the other end feeling stronger and more positive. In some ways, I wish I could have the same belief that so many other people have that things will work out. I'm not able to say things will work because things did not work out for a good many members of my family. Things did not work out for millions of people then and are still not working out for millions of people now.

Although I worry a lot about how the camps will affect me this second time around and the continuous socializing that I will have to do, it is important for me to be with a multifaith group of people who are committed and devoted to social action.
I guess these are some of the reasons why I am going back. Primarily, I hope to get some closure on what I feel is unfinished business on many levels.

October 31

Here I am sitting in the airport experiencing a lot of anxiety as I prepare to leave on this trip. I have some other things going on in my life that weighs heavily on my mind. I am starting out exhausted and generally wiped out from being under so much stress. I find myself worrying that the group of people that I am traveling with is much more mentally and physically healthy in comparison and I have to fight a voice inside me that is concerned about not measuring up to the rest of the group. Despite all this emotional tension, I am aware of a building excitement to be revisiting the wonderful city of Berlin.

November 1

Having arrived in Berlin I spent some time today revisiting some of the memorial sites to re-take some photographs for my slide shows. What struck me was how these in-your-face memorials seemed to just be a part of the scenery, as people passing by seemed not to notice them. I wish I had stopped and asked some English-speaking Germans what they thought about the memorials.

At the end of the day, I found my way to the hotel where some members of the group had stayed last night. I dropped my luggage there and then went off to meet them in an Irish Pub near the train station. Along with the food, I enjoyed the lively discussion about forgiveness in relation to the Jewish people and the Holocaust, but still felt awkward being with the group. As I listened, I tried to relax and give myself time to get used to being with this lively group. I wonder if I would have been better off having come here alone.

I am on the night train to Warsaw now and I have a ‘sleeper’ to myself. I find that I am enjoying the ride, as it reminds me of my train trips across Canada as a child. But here I am in Poland, a country that killed three million Jewish people including my relatives! Should I be feeling enjoyment? Am I immune to the atrocities--so used to them that it has become second nature to me? How do I make sense of this traveling high in light of that? We will be going to the Treblinka camp in the morning so I best sign off and get some rest.
November 2

I was delighted to find that a Polish man met us at the train station. He was to guide us on our trip to the Treblinka extermination camp and Warsaw memorials. He took us to the hotel where we dropped our bags and had a chance to eat a nice breakfast of bread, cheese, and eggs before he drove us to Treblinka.

As we entered the site, I noticed the signage was still far too small and easy to miss. As I walked around the camp, I perceived a difference in my response this second time round. The memorial seemed much smaller, not nearly as monumental as I remembered. Even the symbolic tombstones seemed less powerful—more like ordinary stones. Why is that? Maybe it’s because it is a different season—or perhaps I built it up in my mind too much. Maybe it’s because I needed to take more photographs and was distracted from the impact of its meaning; or maybe it’s because I was with all these other people. I find that I don’t seem to be affected by the actual numbers of people murdered here. Why are these facts not shaking me to my core again? Maybe I’m just not letting it in because my research has shown that this is the place where my family was murdered. How can I let that in?

Although most of the stones in Treblinka have no names because the Nazi’s didn’t keep track of the people they murdered, there are some stones with the names of the towns where the people came from. There is a stone with the name of my family’s town—Staszow. One of the group members brought out coloured stones and candles to help me honour them. I was very touched and moved by her incredible thoughtfulness.

After we left Treblinka, we went back to Warsaw and the guide took us around to some of the memorials in the Warsaw Ghetto. I was anxious to get some new shots of the Memorial to the Warsaw Freedom Fighters, but the light was not good enough. I will have to come back tomorrow. We went to a number of other memorials and then ate supper at a wonderful veggie restaurant. It was so nice to eat plant-based food again. I am trying hard to be nice and normal while in my companion group--am I measuring up? It has been a long day and I am exhausted now, spending time socializing with the group is draining my energy.

November 3

I slept well and was up early this morning to rush back to the Warsaw Memorial; it was a treat being by myself again. I think that I got a good shot of the memorial and hope the slides turn out.
After another hotel breakfast, we took the train to Krakow. I had made an appointment to talk with the director of the Centre for Jewish Culture/Judaica Foundation in Krakow. After we registered with the Bearing Witness Retreat, my group of companions came along with me and joined in the discussion with the director about the foundation, which preserves Jewish heritage. I was surprised to find out that he was a non-Jew. I was impressed because I want to think that there are righteous Poles out there. I took the opportunity to ask him about what he knew about the people that were transported from Staszow. He theorizes that they went to Belzak, not Treblinka. I left the meeting feeling that I was no closer to knowing where the Nazis killed my family members.

We had dinner and as I listened to the group, I noticed how the people related at a feeling level. It’s hard for me to be present because I find myself preoccupied. I wonder why I came on this trip. The Holocaust and Retreat seem secondary to the worries that I’m trying to leave behind.

After supper, we went to the Krakow market. I had an anti-Semitic experience with one of the merchants at a stall; it shook me up. I was with a non-Jewish member of the group when it happened. I notice that there’s a difference in how Jews and non-Jews respond to issues that arise. In some ways, the empathy of the non-Jews appears to be stronger than that of the Jewish members. Perhaps is it because we Jews have grown up with the Holocaust and its nothing new. I find myself being tired and disconnected to the atrocity. I expect part of the problem is that I am spending my time and energy socializing and trying to get along--tonight it’s taking its toll. I am glad that I have a room to myself. It is nice to have some solitude--I don’t have to be “on.”

November 4

We took a bus in order to have a tour of the Krakow Jewish quarters called Kazimierz before checking into our rooms at the hostel in Oswiecim. The Disneyland façade disturbed me and I felt little emotion. I did enjoy the small museum in the Krakow Ghetto beside the deportation site. I was dismayed to find that the selection site was unmarked by any kind of memorial about what took place there. When I was in the museum, I was very moved by a photograph of a lone woman carrying a shovel over her shoulder with a group of men following behind her. I was struck by her stance; it was filled with courage and determination. When I look at that photograph, I can’t imagine what it must have been like for her. My mind stops at a
certain point and I can't get beyond that. I guess I am not capable of the kind of imagination that would let me know what it must have been like for women at that time.

At the hostel, I joined my roommate—a Buddhist nun from Germany. I haven't shared a room with anyone for a very long time and am anxious with how it will go. We ate supper and I found the food to be very good; in fact, I notice that I am overeating on a daily basis. I realize that there is a lot of pleasure for me in eating. After supper, there is a meeting of the Retreat group. I notice that there are a large number of Jewish participants. The leaders suggested that we might choose to experience the Retreat in silence. I'm tired of socializing as I have been at it for several days. It seems to be clogging up my thoughts and draining me of some of my energy. I look forward to taking up the suggestion and will be silent as often as I can.

November 5

Today we went to the Auschwitz I camp in the morning and Auschwitz II-Birkenau in the afternoon. Auschwitz I was the same as I remembered it, although there was a new exhibition of photographs and commentary about the women prisoners of Auschwitz. I noticed that I was not as affected by the experience as I was the first time I came. As I listened to the stories told by the guides, I felt as if I was distancing myself from them. I guess that I am getting more cynical as I grow older. I am no longer surprised at the evil the human race is capable of; we are animals out of whack.

Although it is difficult for me to imagine the unimaginable events that happened in the camp on a daily basis, it wasn't until we had the multifaith ritual at the Execution Wall that I really got in touch with my emotions and the atrocity of the camps. It was the first time in my life that I felt support from non-Jews—and I felt thankful! I hadn't realized how hungry I was for this. I think I knew then, why I had to come to this Retreat. I have needed this empathy. I need to have a place in the world, to not feel like an alien or an outcast as a Jew.

When we went to Auschwitz II-Birkenau, the largeness of the camp struck me. It was even vaster than I remembered, more sinister and stark. As I stood in the camp, I become aware of my struggle to interweave the scenes that play in my mind about what happened here with the outer experience of the place itself; it was difficult to merge the two experiences. I was in my mind with my imagination trying to fill in the spaces of the actual camp. Near the end of the day, I stood at the large pond where the Nazis threw the ashes of murdered people and I thought about my relatives. It was important to me to be able to participate in the rituals and ceremonies that honoured the people that died here.
This evening we had a “bearing witness” circle where people talked about their experiences of the day. I felt inspired when one of our members said that she refused to let the horror deaden her, but instead wanted to turn it around into a sacred activity.

November 6

Today was a very powerful day.

It started out with a wonderful breakfast before we walked over to the Birkenau camp. When we got there, we came together in a large circle on the selection site where twenty people each read the names of one hundred people who the Nazis murdered here. At the end of reading, I added the names of my family members. Afterwards we broke up into various religious services; I attended the Jewish ceremony and was moved to tears. It is seldom, if ever, that I engage in religious services or rituals; however, it seemed so appropriate here on the grounds of Birkenau. I even welcomed the chance to say Kaddish for mom and dad. It’s difficult to know how to memorialize and commemorate those murdered but I feel what took place on the site today was a gift for me. I wept for the first time in a long while. I also took someone’s tallit onto my lap and stroked it. That was kind of a unique experience for me. In a sense, I think what I was really doing there was accepting myself as a Jew. I guess it was also about accepting my father. The tallit represented him and stroking it was my way of accepting my old dad.

After a delicious lunch of soup and bread, there was another naming ceremony and Kaddish on the selection site. We also had a small memorial ceremony at Crematorium V. I was very touched by the sermon given there by a priest from Italy. I took a picture of the horrific ruins of the crematorium because people need to know that murder went on in this very spot.

This evening, we visited an Auschwitz survivor in a Franciscan monastery outside of the city. He is an artist and his painting filled the walls of the room where we met. His subject matter really took me aback. The paintings were filled with stylized representations of starving and dying concentration camp prisoners. I am starting to feel like the victims are with me here—they have re-emerged.

I am starting to be aware that ritual may be important to me, but will I make the effort when I return home?
November 7--Seven days in Poland, seven days to go

This morning I attempted to take a photograph of the people in my small morning witnessing circle. I could tell by the expressions on some group member’s faces that they were very irritated with me. I felt terribly remorseful. I have also been worried that I may not sound sincere in what I have said in the circle.

I decided to go alone to Auschwitz and spend more time looking at the women’s exhibit. After, I walked over to Auschwitz II-Birkenau and met two of my Vancouver group for lunch. I spent the afternoon wandering amongst the Birkenau barracks on my own and noted that there was more information about women on the new signage around the camp. I missed most of the rituals offered by the Retreat today but was glad to spend more time looking around the camp and taking photographs.

The large bearing witness circle this evening was very disappointing and upsetting. There was a request that the large group support a contingency of participants and leaders that wanted to read out 150 Nazi names, just as we had been reading the names of those murdered by them. I guess after the initial shock, I am not that surprised. After all, we’re conditioned to be anti-Semites; we’re all conditioned that way. I was also astounded to hear one of the participants comment on the exclusiveness of the Retreat--too Jewish, too American--especially when I was thinking just the opposite. I think the Retreat has been very inclusive and find it very healing being together with people from Poland and Germany; the parents of my roommate were Nazi guards!

From what I understand, the suggestion of reading the Nazi names came from the Buddhist ideas around forgiveness. I think the question of forgiveness is a complex one. How can I ever “forgive” the Nazis? It is an absurd question in this context. I’m feeling very depressed, saddened, and even trampled on right now. Of course, that old inner voice is here again saying, “You don’t measure up.”

November 8--Eight days in Germany and Poland, six days to go

In the small witnessing circle this morning, we discussed the meeting from last night and I felt all right. I returned to Auschwitz after breakfast and viewed the gas chamber, crematorium, and several of the barracks with displays of different nations. It was welcoming to see the Israeli flags carried by the visiting students from Israel.

While viewing the exhibits, I felt somewhat numb. I’ve seen so many photographs and exhibits of the Holocaust. I’m not sure how much more I can take. It is almost as if I have
become completely saturated. Why do I keep going back for more? I noticed that the photographs of the Jewish resistance in the Jewish exhibit really drew my attention primarily because they were not corpses or walking skeletons. I tried to distance myself from these horrifying images but I can't. Is it because I relate too closely to them since I see myself in them, as I am very skeletal in my own frame? I have difficulty imagining that they were once live humans. I'm surprised that they're still alive in that form. My God, they're still living, with these stick-like limbs—the whole unfairness of life, the unfairness of it all.

I became aware that when I am looking at the photographs, I have a script in my mind that says, "I've seen this before. I've seen it so often now, that I can handle it. It's old hat for me. I am a seasoned concentration camp observer;" it sort of acts as a buffer for me. Of course, too, there is always the Retreat that I want to get back to, so that pulls me away. I guess I just don't want to plunge into the despair I felt after my first visit to Poland because I can't really get away from those images, they stick in my mind like Velcro.

Our group from Vancouver had a small memorial ceremony in the children's barrack at Birkenau. I felt quite moved, and appreciated it very much—especially saying my parent's names. We also went over to the pond and did another ritual with a stone given to us by a Haida Guaii elder.

We went back to the hostel and all the members of the Vancouver group, except me, left before the final Shabbat supper to catch the night train back to Berlin. I found that I really missed them this evening during supper. The Retreat group attempted to be joyous amidst the very provocative photographs of the holocaust that were on all four walls of the dining hall. One woman that I talked to during supper referred to the barracks in Auschwitz-Birkenau as a "spiritual place, a holy place." I just couldn't relate. For me, Birkenau remains the most horrific place on this earth.

Sadly, I do not feel at all elated, just somewhat numb, and certainly not spiritual or uplifted. In considering the events of the Retreat, I don't think that I got very much out of it. Was I unrealistic to think that I might change from an atheist to a "spiritual being" in a few days of performing ritual? Was it too difficult for me to be in a group setting for almost a week? Did this fact get in the way of my being able to come out of myself and connect with the participants and the Retreat program? I really did enjoy my roommate and some of the other participants. Maybe it was the large bearing witness circle that influenced my entire feelings. Did the discussion about reading out the Nazi names deflate the Retreat for me? Were the
comments regarding the Retreat being too Jewish, too American ruin everything I gained? I’m very confused and tired; it’s been a tough week.

November 10--Ten days in Poland, four days to go

Yesterday I arrived in Staszow and met with the Museum director. I was very moved by the efforts of he and his colleagues to set up a room that was dedicated to the murdered Jewish people of Staszow. Today the director gave me the “Jewish” tour. We went to a place where a synagogue used to be located, saw the footpaths to the river, and then the cemetery. There was an effort to resurrect the tombstones there. And then I saw them--bright intense blue swastikas spray painted on several of the tombstones, as well as on the monument. Someone had poured thick paint on top of one of the stones. The director was horrified when he saw the swastikas on the tombstones; he was so upset and embarrassed. I really felt so sorry for him, but it did not surprise me. I hurriedly ran around taking photographs. There are little Nazis living in Staszow--but without any Jews.

My hotel room looks out at the town square where Staszow Jews were rounded up by the Nazis on November 8th, 1942. I’m still not clear as to where they were killed; it appears that some went to Belzac and some to Treblinka. Will I ever know? I miss the Vancouver group and feel lonely and depressed. I’m anxious to go home.

Tonight I am going back to Berlin to retake some photographs of the monuments that I missed last time and then to the Ravensbrück camp where Nazis held women prisoners. I have an appointment to talk with the museum director.

November 12--Two days to go

I was a day early for my appointment with the museum Director but was able to meet with the Director of Education; it was the highlight of my trip. Although he is a non-Jew, his theory and ideas about Holocaust education are inspiring. While in conversation with him, I ceased to be depressed. In fact, I felt inspired, alive, and mentally healthy. His comments were extremely stimulating and thought provoking. For example, he believes that the Jew-as-victim has become a symbol so Jews are seen as symbols not as real people. He thinks that there needs to be a balance between education and information about both victims and perpetrators. Specifically in Germany, rather than hearing the stories of survivors (after all elderly women are non-persons in Western culture--without feelings or an inner life), he thinks that it is very important for Holocaust educators to encourage students to raise questions about their family’s
involvement in the war and to examine the forces that created perpetrators and bystanders. To make Holocaust education meaningful he believes that we should aim to move towards anti-racist education. He also thinks that each country should develop its own form of Holocaust education, specific to the population and culture.

I also met the woman in charge of creating the exhibit about the Ravensbrück guards. She posed many question about how it should be done. She wondered how to express the fact that at first the guards were “human” and that initially there was not a great deal of difference between the viewer of the exhibit and the guards themselves. I looked at all the photographs of the guards and noticed one in particular where the guards were having a day off—they really did look like normal women rather than the brutal persecutors that they were in the camp.

My room and the food here is very nice and I am feeling uplifted, but what a contradiction! Here I am stating what a nice place this is yet it sits on ground where hundreds of thousands of women were tortured and murdered. I wonder if I shall ever recover from this emotionally draining trip. How long will it take to regain my energy?

November 18

I was delighted with the meeting I had with the Director of Ravensbrück; I was able to take a number of photographs of her and we had a pleasant conversation. Right now, although I have the heavy feeling of the camps hanging around me, I am very happy to be home again.

As I think about the experience of the trip, it has left me with many questions. What social action will I take to help create peace? Has the Bearing Witness Retreat influenced me towards any direction? Looking back, I don’t see what we did at the Retreat as a very anti-racist activity. Although having Jews, Germans, and Poles together in one place was anti-racist, I don’t see just bearing witness to the camps as anti-racist. I think we needed to acknowledge that the extermination and murder in the camps was not just a Jewish problem, that Nazis targeted many groups—women, gays, and so on. Somehow, we need to develop a certain kind of education that is effective and I don’t know what that really is. Bearing witness needs to go a step further towards doing something about the pervasiveness of racism in general. Along with discussing what we can do about it, I would have appreciated having this issue being raised in our discussion circles in either the morning or evening gatherings because what we were bearing witness to each day in the camps was the results of racism. That was something that was really missing for me during the Retreat. Maybe the organizers thought that we were dealing with enough and didn’t want to take it that one step further. Maybe they assumed, quite
rightly, that we would doing something about it after the fact. Still, I would have liked to have had some political discussion.

I remember asking an African-American woman about living with the history of slavery because I think it is the same as living with the holocaust for Jewish people. It is just as intense and makes living a life that much more difficult. I remember asking her how she lives with the knowledge of slavery and she said that she’s able to live because she turns it into political action. Similarly, although I can never do enough, I intend to keep on with my participation in social action issues because they give me a reason to live. I know I can take action through personal and group ritual, in social or political statements through my artwork, slide presentations, and social justice performances. I guess I have this irrational sense of hope that maybe things may get better and that certainly keeps me going. I think there is a part of me that has a feeling that things will get better.
**KAREN: Witnessing Contrasts**

I was exceptionally pleased to have Karen join our witnessing group. She heard about the project through word-of-mouth and was enthusiastic to join in and support the project in any way possible. She brought with her a keen optimism and sense of life. Her interest in exploring all aspects of the human condition brought a depth of perspective to our group.

Karen is a well-educated professional working full-time in a helping profession. Now, in her later 40's, she is well established in her career, relationship, and community. Having been born and raised in a Jewish community in Canada, she is well acquainted with the Holocaust story. It was her desire to visit the concentration camps so that she might witness the Holocaust story from a frontline view, expecting that it would expand her own understanding of life.

As with Sima, I conducted two interviews—one before leaving Vancouver for the Retreat and one after our return. We also engaged in two conversational dialogues where Karen reflected on her experience with the performance and her response to the interpretive story. Karen also offered me a copy of a retrospective summary of her experiences on the trip, which she wrote upon her return. She explained to me that the days were so full during the trip that she was not able to spend the time she wanted writing daily journal entries while in Europe. In addition, she gave me a set of photographs taken specifically for the study. Finally, we were involved in a number of informal conversations as we visited more socially while practicing for the witnessing performance.

I wrote Karen’s story in a form that reflects the very distinct manner in which she constructed her experience. As I spent time with her interview texts, documents, and photographs, it became very clear that she developed her experience through contrasts—even stating that she understood things best that way. I have used distinct fonts to guide the reader through the text of Karen’s experience—**bold italic font indicates a main thought or transition**, both normal and italicized Times Roman indicate the different contrasts that Karen describes. It is best to follow a single font to read the contrasts she constructs. I use the normal and italicized font alternately so that the reader can follow the various contrasting statements that Karen makes throughout the text.

Here is Karen’s story.
I think I understand things best when I experience them in sharp contrast to something else.

Why Auschwitz?

To affirm and savour life
To get closer to death and horror

To honour and remember that part of history
To honour and respect myself

To know the significance of my life
To make letting go of my life easier

Because I was raised in a Jewish community in Canada, I have had exposure to the Holocaust all of my life.

When I was a child, I heard that children were in the camps and it shocked me; it shattered my naive childhood assumptions about the world.

I was not shocked. I just went on—the Holocaust was a given; it was just a part of history.

What really happened was hidden because people had to do some very bad things to survive.

I saw evidence—numbers tattooed on the arms of people who came into the Jewish bakeries.

I saw checks sent from the German government as payments to Jews who had suffered or lost property during the war.

People didn’t talk much—there were experiences that I didn’t really know anything about.

Even though I grew up with the Holocaust around me, the first time I remembered trying to think what it would be like to have been one of those people was at a Jewish summer camp as an adolescent. We fasted, read about and remembered the Holocaust; it was a very powerful experience for me.

Part of this journey to the camps is about examining as much as is possible that sense of me and them [prisoners, guards], me and other.

So, I see the role of witness as very, very important. It allows me to concretize the fact that something has happened, to face it, and to grapple with it.
Witnessing from my own lens creates a personal interface with what I witness. Everyone is affected by what they witness in different ways. They all have their own lens.

*Witnessing acknowledges something that has happened to someone else—out there.*

*Witnessing brings forwards aspects of myself, parts of me that I don’t know—in here.*

*Witnessing creates a profound sense of social responsibility to heal and help the world.*

Thinking about going on the trip, to Auschwitz left me with some concerns.

I worried about my own reactions, what I might have to change about myself, and whether I would fit into the Retreat group in Auschwitz. I worried about traveling with a group of people in close quarters and going to a former Eastern Block country.

So, I prepared myself to go to Auschwitz in many different ways—mostly I put my face in it.

By spending personal time reading, planning, and informing myself. By telling others about it, explaining it to them, letting people know I was going.

Someone said, and I said:

You are putting your nose in evil. Yes, I need to put my nose in evil lest I forget the evil within me.

Also, I participated with the people who were going to Auschwitz in blessings at two places of worship.

I invited my fellow travelers to my synagogue, where we were called up for an aliyah, and were given a blessing at the Torah. There were prayers for a safe journey from the Rabbi. I was invited to a church, where we were called to stand in front of the congregation at the end of the service. Congregants were told about our journey.

*We received the names, from congregants of friends and family members whom they knew had perished during the Holocaust.*

*Several come forward to give us the names of individuals who they knew had perished during the Holocaust, and to wish us well.*
When I think of the holocaust,  
I am curious and interested  
in the ideas and facts around  
human mortality and grief.

Being aware of my mortality keeps my existence in perspective, so I can enjoy and savour every minute of my life.

Facing my own mortality can be frightening.

The idea of not mattering helps me grapple with my mortality. When I embrace that, I am attending to the fact that I do matter.

Understanding and experiencing the magnitude of death in the camps lessens fears about the process of dying.

Life and death are part of a cycle--a life, a death, a life--there is a certain sense of detachment.

I would fight to the death that my life would matter. I would die to matter. My journey to the camps is about mattering and not mattering.

When I arrived with the Canadian group in the Polish train station,  
I was struck by how cold it was inside the station.

Bundled up in warm clothing, our Canadian group was warmly greeted by our driver and tour guide in the Warsaw train station. We warmed ourselves with cups of hot coffee or tea.

The cold interior space of the Polish train station let me know that I was not in Canada. I also remember a bitter local panhandler coldly accosting me.

We drove for two hours and arrived at the memorial for the extermination camp called Treblinka.

We arrived in Warsaw on All Saints Day. The Poles celebrate by visiting the graves of loved ones and placing flowers on the gravestones. As we drove the long way to Treblinka, there were flowers in every cemetery and church.

I was struck by the fact that there were no gravestones in Treblinka.

Four of the stones that were marked, stood out for me--“Grecia” because I wanted to show it to someone I know from Greece; “Bialystok” and “Staszow” the names of towns from which family members of our Canadian group were sent to their deaths, and “Janusz Korczak” a figure who became significant for me during this trip.

The vast majority of stones on the Treblinka site have no markings on them at all. It signifies the anonymity of those who died there.
Nazis created a mock train station so the people would not panic. They painted a clock on the station wall showing a perpetual six o'clock.

I took a photograph of the real train tracks near Treblinka. I was fascinated by what was real. The real train tracks where the people arrived at the destination of their deaths.

From Treblinka, we went back to Warsaw to see the monuments in the Ghetto.

On the way out of Treblinka, we stopped at a country store for nourishment--bread, cheese, and vodka--as is the custom after a Jewish funeral.

I lifted my glass and toasted “le-chaim,” to life. I felt gratitude that we could leave Treblinka and had our lives.

We saw the monuments to Danilovich, and others who resisted the Nazis.

I was struck by the sculpture on the opposite side of the monument of Danilovich showing the Jews being herded to their deaths by the Nazis.

Right beside the same buildings that were there some 60 years ago, the Umshlagplatz, stood. It was the actual place from which Jews were transported to their deaths.

At the Umshlagplatz, I loved the marble and the sign itself. It was just lovely architecture--a beautiful place.

From Warsaw, we took the train to Krakow where we registered for, and began, the activities of the Bearing Witness Retreat.

One of our members made an appointment to talk with the director of the Centre for Jewish Culture. It is an educational institution intended to inform Jews and non-Jews, alike, about Jewish culture. I thought is was a wonderful meeting.

The director lost relatives in concentration camps during the war, and is not Jewish himself. Funding for the center did not come from the American Jewish community, but rather other secular organizations. A non-Jew heading this organization may invite more dialogue among different groups than would occur were the organization headed by a Jew--besides there really aren’t that many Jews left who could head the organization.

Our Canadian group wanted to stay together at the same centre during the Retreat.

Unfortunately, we were unable to remain together at the same facility during the Retreat. We were off to a bad start with the Retreat organizers.

The first activity of the Retreat was a tour of Kazimierz, the old Jewish district of Krakow.
Resurrection of the tombstones was attempted in the Jewish cemetery. Thousands of broken pieces formed a wall around the cemetery.

Most of the cemetery was destroyed and desecrated during the war. All the tombstones were broken off their foundations and thousands of pieces from the broken tombstones could not be resurrected.

The Jewish museum told the story of the Jews of Krakow, their humiliation, deportation, and destruction. After the museum, we went to the actual ghetto. The ghetto wall looked like tombstones; it was a cruel and macabre message to the Jews that they were in a grave-living in a grave.

What struck me were the bright, lively banners of Israeli high schools that adorned the Jewish museum. Hundreds and hundreds of banners—where there was death, there was life.

From Krakow we were off by bus to Oswiecim.

On the bus, I talked with the Dutch film crew who had come to film the Retreat. In particular, they would focus on one participant who had been hidden during the war; she lost her entire family at Auschwitz.

We were quiet on the drive out to Oswiecim. The discussion with the film crew distracted me from thoughts of where we were going. When we arrived in Oswiecim, we drove past Auschwitz; I could see the barbed wire fences. The day was cold and gray.

On the first day of the Retreat we had an initial tour of Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

We started by walking silently to Auschwitz I. We had a guided tour of the camp. At the end of the morning, we had an interfaith service at the execution wall where we said kaddish. We stood silently, remembering.

We saw a film of the atrocities committed in the concentration camps before we walked into the camp through the gate with the words, "Arbeit Macht Frei" over it. It seemed surreal. We toured the barracks of Auschwitz I and saw the collections of personal effects such as hairbrushes, luggage, toothbrushes, artificial limbs, and eyeglasses—all taken from the prisoners.

We stood in the role-call area, where prisoners, in essentially pajamas, waited for hours if someone from their work group was missing. It was not unheard of for them to stand there in the freezing cold for over 12 hours—many died as a result.

One beautiful sunny morning, I took a photograph of the electrified fences. It was a beautiful shot in the mist—a reflection of the beauty with the horror.
After the initial day, we settled into a routine pattern of daily activity.

In the mornings and afternoons, we would go to Birkenau, sit in silence or meditate on the selection site, read the names of those who perished, and participate in interfaith services. We said kaddish in many different languages.

One night, we went to the Franciscan Monastery to view the artwork of Marian Kolodziej—a Auschwitz survivor. He had been in Auschwitz almost five years. After suffering a stroke later in life, the gruesome images of the atrocities came back to him. I took a photograph of one of his paintings; it showed two starving men supporting one another as they hung on a chain by their left wrists.

There were opportunities to speak out in the large group meetings. One evening was very powerful. Those of us who wished spoke in front of the entire 100 people present. I chose to speak that night and said that I did not want to be deadened to horror around me. I said that I did not want to be so distracted from that horror, that I did not notice it. I talked about savoring life in the face of death.

There were opportunities to speak out in my small group discussion meetings. This was the group where participants had the opportunity to debrief any experiences in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. The guiding rule—speak from your heart. On the first day, I said I was there to come to better terms, if at all possible, with my own mortality.

There are two stories that stayed with me after listening, seeing, and imagining what happened in the camps of Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The story of Janusz Korczak really stands out for me. He was a psychologist who ran an orphanage for destitute children. I imagine him going with the children into the gas chambers of the extermination camp Treblinka. The thing that touches me the most in this story is how he got the children dressed up and told them that they were going on a parade with flags and banners so they wouldn’t be frightened. This story really touches me, moves me. The courage of that man, the kindness, the devotion, the compassion, and the generosity.

How do I compare? How generous and compassionate am I? Korczak is a reference point, a leading edge for me. He makes it easier to die, because he did it voluntarily with courage.

I heard stories of the SS killing people just for having a family photograph on them. The especially sadistic SS officers or guards would bring out a mother and child. He would shoot child in front of the mother, just to see how the mother might respond, how she might collapse. Then he would shoot the mother. Finally, he would bring out the father to see his family and how he might respond and then shoot him. I felt horror and sadness. This story especially touched me because I imagined this type of family as similar to my own sister-in-law’s father’s—he is a survivor of the camps.

The vivid image of what might have happened was very powerful. It wasn’t static like a photograph it was more like a film, alive, moving. There was a personal quality that made it alive for me.
These stories upset me and I was glad they did because I should be upset with such stories. My emotional response let me know that I was alive.

When I hear so much horror, I worry that I will become deadened emotionally and not able to receive and experience the full impact of these stories.

There are a number of events that stand out in my mind.

When one of our group members read the names of the dead at the selection site and included the ages of the people when they died, I found that to be very helpful. It made me feel lighter.

During one of the evening discussions with the large group, the leaders asked us to discuss whether it was appropriate for participants to read the names of the perpetrators under the aegis of the Peacemaker Community. I still feel uncomfortable with the idea. I wouldn’t want my family to hear or be exposed to that type of discussion. Even though I understand the Buddhist notion—I am the other and other is me, that situation was still a challenge for me.

One day, I went to the Auschwitz camp alone to look at the exhibits and take some photographs. I had a fright when I went into one of the barracks where I was looking at an exhibit. Although I knew I was in a museum, I got really frightened.

All of a sudden, the lights went out; kind of what happens on death row when they electrocute somebody. I was deep in the building and there were no lights. I had to get out! I thought—I am in a barrack in Auschwitz! It frightened me and it made me wonder what might have been going through the mind of prisoners in that barrack.

Two ceremonies that we had with our small Canadian group stood out for me. The first one was in the children’s barracks in Birkenau. After naming friends and family, who we wished to be with us, we spoke the names given to us by people in Vancouver. We then lit yahrtzeit candles and said kaddish. The second was the ceremony at the pond where the ashes of hundreds of thousands of people had been placed. These were very moving ceremonies—reminders of the horrific losses in that place.

In one of the small group discussions, some of the German participants expressed feelings of having their legs cut off during the Retreat. My understanding was that they were cutting their own legs off because of their guilt and shame about the actions of their forbears, such as witnessing Jews being taken from their homes and sent away and having relatives who were SS officers or guards. Personally, I did not see them as the enemy or the problem--after all, they did them come to the Retreat. They were just having difficulty ridding themselves of their own shame.
Someone brought up the issue of too much laughter and levity in this very serious place. I think that comment was directed at me. That was his perspective and his way of doing the Retreat, mine was different.

We only have today and I want to savour every minute, even at Auschwitz. If I laugh, rejoice, or express my gratitude--so be it. At this Retreat, I know that I experienced laughter, fun and sadness and horror.

The final evening of the Retreat, we took the train back to Berlin.

When I returned to Berlin, I realized that I needed a break from the group. I had come to my limit of being with people, so I took a risk of going out on my own. It was a little unnerving and disorienting, but I wanted that. It intensifted the experience of what it was like to be alone.

I was grateful to travel with such a fantastic group of people with whom I had sensed a communion, a place to connect, a grounding, an anchoring, a place to come back to—a safe circle.

I experienced the trip to Auschwitz as a natural anti-depressant.

The politics of work and conflicts at home are a small voice inside of me. I see my perspective as having changed. That is wonderful.

The magnitude and experiences of the Holocaust has a very loud voice inside of me. It puts daily struggles into perspective.

I have come from the concentration camps and ghettos—places where youth experienced futility, despair, no future, and death.

I am grateful to experience the potential in the youth around me—their sense of life, intelligence, beauty, excitement, and hope for the future.

I was able to visit and rewrite my early experiences of Germans and Poles. I openly engaged and expressed myself with them. While I was there, I forgot to remember the hate with which I was raised. It feels healing and calming.

Germans and Poles are two nationalities or groups that I was raised to hate and mistrust. These are people that I viewed as the enemy.

There was no care in the concentration camps; they were filled with personal anguish.

I am doing better with taking care of myself; I am honouring myself more in my life.

We escaped! We were free! We got to survive! I’m grateful to have survived!

They were prisoners. They carried all their possessions in a suitcase, were put on trains, went to the selection site, were in the barracks, went to gas chambers and then the crematoria.
There are a number of things that I have done, or want to do, because I vicariously witnessed the atrocities in the concentration camps.

My action will be public because my experience in the camps will affect my work with others. My work will be enhanced by caring for myself and being well-tuned. Then I will be more able to give to others who will do good in the world. When I returned I made financial contributions to a few Jewish causes—education and healthcare—in Canada, the U.S. and Israel. I guess it was my response to feeling uncomfortable with some of the comments about American Jewry that I heard at the Retreat. It was my way of creating an antidote to those comments.

Peace—and the peace that I am focusing in on is the inner peace. From the inner peace will come the outer.

I don’t know if I personally need to share my experience in a way that’s public such as a performance. Personally, it is more of a letting go, an easing up, a savouring of this moment, less fear about the future, just enjoying this moment, savouring this moment, having more peace, more relaxation, more fun. So for me, it’s not specifically a peace movement I want to get involved in or heavy-duty political action.

I will give to the outer to create peace, I will promote peace in the other.
It was a great surprise and delight for me when Anne decided to come to Auschwitz with my participant group. Through word-of-mouth Anne heard about our imminent trip and spontaneously decided to come within weeks of our departure date. When I met with her, she explained to me that “in the right time, you do things in no time at all.”

Anne immigrated to Canada from Europe when she was in her mid-twenties. She came from a Protestant background and converted to Judaism more than 15 years ago. At the time, she married a Jewish man and chose to raise her children in the Jewish tradition. Now, currently in her early 50s, Anne is a well-educated professional practicing in a helping profession.

I conducted two interviews with Anne—one before leaving for the Bearing Witness Retreat and one after our return. We had two conversational dialogues related to the performance and my interpretation of her story. During the trip, Anne kept a detailed journal of her thoughts and experiences. Upon returning, she translated most of her journal entries into the form of a very long letter to her mother where she described the trip in detail. When she gave me a copy of the letter, she explained that it included everything in her journal except her feelings, as she wanted to allow the reader “to be free to feel for themselves.” Further, her intention is to use the letter as a teaching tool to attain her goal of furthering Holocaust education. In addition to the interviews and letter, she gave me a set of photographs taken specifically for the study. As Anne was somewhat involved with the performance, we were able to have some informal conversations together during rehearsals.

I wrote Anne’s story in two distinct voices compiled from the various accounts available to me. I noticed from reading her reports that she spoke about similar aspects of the trip in very different ways when addressing different audiences (i.e., researcher versus family member). I believe that this is significant as she constructs the story of her experiences very differently—one more objective/factual (indicated by normal Times Roman font) and the other more personal/cultural (indicated by italicized Times Roman). I suggest that the cultural aspects of her life appear more prominently in her family voice for two reasons—her strong emotional connections to family and birthplace, and family or cultural dialects of languaging experience. The reader may follow the two voices by reading both aspects in each marked section.
I begin the account with a story that Anne told me at our first interview. I believe that this story reflects Anne’s enthusiasm for independence, resistance, and hope—aspects of her identity which are reflected throughout her narrative.

Here is Anne’s story:

*Before I left on the trip, I was talking to a friend of mine who, as a child, was hidden by his family maid for three years until his parents came back from being imprisoned in Auschwitz. After the war, it took his mother almost a year to come back. Although he’s not sure about the actual details because people tried to keep it secret, he said that his mother was young and pretty, so when she got to Auschwitz she ended up in one of the trailers outside the camp which serviced the German army. After the Americans liberated the camp, she actually stayed in the trailer and went into business for herself servicing the American army. She was able to make some money before she went home to pick up her child. Understandably, there wasn’t much talk about this particular story in the family, it sort of came down to him in bits and pieces. When I heard his story, I was just stunned; it’s obviously not the kind of story that most survivors and their families would want to be telling. I think it’s just an amazing story of survival because no one knows what they would do if they were in that type of situation. We just don’t know. I mean, we can fantasize or imagine, but we don’t know. I think this story stretches the bounds—to think of her doing that and surviving it. So, in my view it’s a terrific thing.*

I went to Poland for both personal and cultural reasons. Although when Patrice said she was going last year and I ignored her, it came to me a month ago that I really wanted to go along.

My reasons for going were a tapestry of all different coloured threads—trauma work burnout, family members dying, fear of recurrent illness, Jewish conversion, Cultural responsibility—Holocaust influences on our lives. It came to me to go when I heard about the trip to the camps the second time. So, that was good.

I gathered information, talked with people who had been there before, collected self-soothing items to take along, talked to myself about not interfering in others people’s experiences by rescuing, and made connections with other people who were going so I would feel safe enough.

I wanted to remember That the horror had already happened I didn’t want it to drive me to despair about human beings or the meaning of life. I needed to feel like it was alright, I could be in it but not in despair. In order to come to that, I had to dig really deep and know that I had resources inside me. So, that’s was a challenge.
Forgiveness can be self-protection from one’s own sense of hopelessness and grief. Indeed, anger and rage is just the flip side of it; I wouldn’t be surprised if either raised it’s head during a trip that could be traumatizing, intense, and demanding.

I worried about how it would be for me when Christians went off on that forgiveness trip. I couldn’t be a party to forgiving people who aren’t there to take responsibility for what they’ve done. I didn’t want to feel hopeless or angry.

So, I worried about that.

Our trip started the weekend before we left when we went as a group went to be blessed at the synagogue and church. We collected the names of family members whom the people wanted us to read during the rituals. We collected many names, so it was very serious.

Looking back, the journey from Sachsenhausen to Treblinka to Auschwitz to Birkenau was cumulative, each place worse and more powerful in its reality than the one before.

I am digesting the experience through writing. A defense against mourning the horror. So, I guess that will come in time.

Sachsenhausen was really devastating. The medical building was the most horrific place in the camp—even worse than the gallows. It is preserved with the autopsy tables with the tiled basement with the runnels for blood. When I write—nazi—

I can’t capitalize the name—Why bother?
medical experiments going on in the camp.

**So, that's what I think.**

In the evening, when we came back from the camp, we wandered around Oranienburger, the ‘Jewish’ area in Berlin. We noticed that there was a memorial about every 100 meters. Germany has ploughed in about 400 million deutschmarks to memorialized the crimes in over 13,000 concentration camps. It is estimated that the nazis deported 55,000 Berlin Jews to concentration camps. They were murdered, robbed, had their synagogues burned, and their graveyards ploughed under.

We got on the night train to Warsaw. We crossed over into Poland at about one o’clock in the morning. Our compartment had us six Canadians, one older man traveling alone, and the porter. Each compartment in the train, which contained about eight berths, was locked down.

We had a driver who took us to the second camp—Treblinka. In order to get there we had to drive for two hours outside of Warsaw. He stopped about 200 meters from the entrance beside the railroad tracks where we all got out. “This is where the trains stopped,” he said.

The nazis razed the gas chambers and ovens of Treblinka to the ground when they felt the approach of the Russians because they didn’t want anyone to see what they had done. Now, there is nothing there but a big field with 17,000 memorial stones.

**The ‘Jewish’ area in Berlin,**
**There are about three Jews there**
**The others**
**Exterminated—NO**
**Murdered.**
**Memorials, memorials, memorials**
**AND STILL THEY’RE ANTI-SEMITIC!**
**And still Israel exists.**
**Go figure.**
**So, the world works in mysterious ways.**

**The train was full of Ukrainians and Russians going to Kiev and beyond.**
**They were drinking**
**Drinking alcohol to them was like mother’s milk.**
**This has obviously been a problem**
**Because the porter is like a psychopath a guy whose mother was probably sitting in a chair in his basement.**
**In the early morning he did bring me a very good cup of strong tea So I forgave him.**

“**They all got off here and walked in to their deaths.**”
**It was a desolate place the reverberations of what happened there went right through all of us.**
**We got back in the car very soberly.**
**When we saw the stones of Treblinka we were devastated. So, we were stunned.**

**A big field Where lie the ashes of at least 800,000 people who were exterminated in 18 months. So, it’s unbelievable.**
This is the camp where most people from the Warsaw ghetto were killed. Janusz Korczak, the famous pediatrician from Warsaw, died there with 100 of his orphans. He is the only one to have an individual stone marked with his name. The stones themselves are the most powerful memorial. 17,000 stones—one for each soul that was murdered in a single day. So, it really is unbelievable.

The next morning we caught the train to Krakow to join the Bearing Witness Retreat group. We were discombobulated but sat in second class all the way to Krakow. So, that was funny.

The Retreat got underway. We began with a tour of Kazimierz—the old Jewish quarters. Before the War, there were 77,000 Jews living in Krakow. Today, there are 120. In 1995, a Catholic priest who was also a member of the Polish government said Poland could never co-exist with the Jews. It was bitterly cold. All I needed to know about Krakow was the extent of murder that took place after I heard this, I never wanted to see Krakow again. My good feelings about the place disappeared. Krakow was a gigantic tomb—a white sepulcher—a city of ghosts. It’s awful and the Poles are still anti-Semitic, unrepentant, non-responsible. It’s the Catholic church that keeps it going. If I had my way, I’d throw guys like that in jail along with the Muslim clergy in Britain who preach racism and hatred from their safe pulpits. So, I digress.

After lunch, we left for Auschwitz-Birkenau. There was the large Catholic Carmelite nunnery just inside the grounds. The empty building is still there with a gigantic cross on the grounds. I saw older people praying there on and off over the five days I was there. It’s the first thing I noticed—The empty nunnery. The Jews of course, forced them to move off the grounds but seeing the Catholics praying there pissed me off? I could feel the old religious tensions of my youth. So, I was angry then.
We entered the Camp through the Auschwitz Museum. Displays of photographs and text describe prisoner experiences. We went immediately into the museum cinema and saw a short film entitled *Silent Witness*, which contained footage taken by the Allied or Russians liberators. From the cinema, we entered the camp through the gate where the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* (work gives freedom) are written. We saw evidence of attempts at normalcy, such as the platform where prisoners played music, birch trees and flower gardens on the site, names for buildings such as “sauna,” and paintings of children playing on the walls of the children’s barrack. All to prevent people from getting out of control because a relatively small number of guards were controlling many thousands of people.

The photographs and film were horrific and more horrific. The text told further, deeper horror of personal suffering. Story after story about the dead, More photographs that recorded everything.

These Germans so full of these evil little twists.

Horror contrasted with fronts of normalcy “Behave With Decorum”—they write above absolutely ghastly communal latrines Orchestra music—they use to hide murder and torture Sauna—they use as a front for shaving heads, tattoos Shower rooms—to disguise gas chambers

The physical suffering was extreme.

Degradation and dehumanization

The norm

But the worst--

separation of mothers from children

*So, it was hard.*

The rows of brick barracks in Auschwitz have been preserved. Many have been turned over to specific countries or groups, such as Slovakian Jews, Poles, French Jews, Hungarian Jews, Dutch Jews, Italians, Greeks, Germans, and Russians. There are also different types of blocks preserved, such as where the medical experiments took place, the women’s barracks, the prison, and the kapos and sondercommando barrack. There were also billets where the SS lived and the camp commandant’s residence.

It was somewhat easier to be alone in Auschwitz there were a lot of people going through the camp.

I did end up in one of the barracks by myself and I have to tell you it was pretty creepy.

I was startled when someone came in.

I just got out of there as a fast as I could.

*So that was a fright.*

In the prison basement, a person could neither sit nor stand in the punishment cell. It was about the size of a small clothes closet. The SS would push as many as five people in the cell and keep them there for three to five days with no food or water. The prisoners had to

It is physical evidence of the very worst crimes that human beings can devise.

I personally think--

it is no place for Jews.

*I think Auschwitz-Birkenau is for non-Jews*
crawl into it on their hands and knees through a small hole in the bottom. to go and try to atone. So, going there should be mandatory.

People were forced to leave their bags outside the gas chambers. The nazis placed the goods in three buildings that were called Kanada barracks. At the time, Canada was seen as a country flowing with riches during the war.

Canada
Kanada
Holding the stolen riches of the murdered
So, this broke my heart.

There was a small gas chamber and crematorium in use in Auschwitz before the Birkenau camp was in full operation. Two ovens are preserved, along with the gas chamber, in the Auschwitz camp.

I walked into and through the gas chamber
I photographed the openings of the ovens
I see the dark coldness of its mouth.
This small crematorium preceded the ultimate killing machine of Birkenau.
Mourners
Fill the opening with flowers
Honour for the dead
So much for the Holocaust deniers.

During the war, there were both concentration and extermination camps. The Germans tried to destroy all evidence when they vacated Birkenau. They razed the barracks and dynamited the gas ovens and crematoria.

I feel responsible to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.
But even if I stand up and speak People will say-- "Well you weren't there, so what do you know."
People say that to me about the country where I was born and raised.
"You have no right to speak about our country because you left long ago."
People have said similar things to me about the Holocaust-- "What right do you have to be upset, you're not a real Jew."
That's what I think we are going to be up against-- trying to find a place to fit in and be heard.
So, that will make it hard.

The train tracks go in through the main brick gate of Birkenau under the guard tower. About 200 meters in, there is the Selection Area. Here, the people got off the trains and went before a row of nazi doctors and SS. The doctors chose people to go to the left--into the camp, and to the right--straight to the gas

Birkenau stands out the most for me.
It's starkness is much worse to be in than Auschwitz.
Just thinking about the site in my mind's eye--
chambers. The evidence of diabolical planning and organization are seen in the execution areas, preserved barracks, train tracks, sauna building, shower rooms, six gas chambers, and crematoria. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chambers</th>
<th>The vastness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The emptiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is shattering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, it was very powerful to be there.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It was helpful to have a tour guide take us through the camp at the beginning of our time there. The guide told many facts and stories about the camps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At the selection site,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When a mother was separated from her eldest son--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He went to the left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And she and her younger children went to the right. Not knowing that she was going straight to the gas chambers, she called after him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't eat the fresh bread!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because he had some stomach problems she was reminding him to take care of himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That was a very poignant story in the sense that the people just had no idea about what was going to happen to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, that was hard to know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of our tour, we were able to walk into and through the building called the sauna. It was where prisoners were stripped of their clothes, showered, shaved, and tattooed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The sauna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was the most difficult place for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That was a horrible place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It had horrible energy in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hadn't really experienced that same horrible type of energy anywhere else in Birkenau--not even in the barracks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sauna still had the mark of evil on it. Especially at the end of the building, where walls were full of family photographs--confiscated from the prisoners by the nazis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, it was very hard to view.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Retreat organizers designed a daily ritual that we repeated for five days. Meeting in the early morning in small groups, meditation and reading of names on the selection site at Birkenau in the later morning, multifaith services, lunch, mediation and reading names again in the afternoon, multifaith services, five long, long days in the cold. Meditating Reading names Witnessing the evidence of crimes. I took the reading of the names The honouring very seriously.
dinner, and a large group meeting in the evening. Reading the names of the dead happened in four groups of five readers. Each group of five sat on benches placed at the edge of the circle in each of the four directions--North, East, South, and West. When one person stopped reading, the next person began; 2000 names read per sitting.

I was so nervous on my day to read. I had diarrhea. It was a powerful symbol of resistance for us to be on the selection site in a circle reading names of the murdered. I don’t think there are souls of the dead floating around Birkenau anymore. They are all gone now. So, that is really something.

As participants in the Retreat, we were free to come and go from the daily activities that were offered. Another woman and I went through the Birkenau barracks together one morning. It was very cold that day--really intense. The prisoners would not have been as warm as I. I was so glad to have a friend with me. We walked around the empty barracks in Birkenau. I was very open to whatever it was that I might experience. And once again I wasn’t expecting what I saw. Everything was just left the way it was after the war. It was frightening to imagine the people there. So, it was extraordinary really.

Many prisoners were sondercommando--Jews, who for special privileges (food), collected the gassed bodies and put them into the ovens. They distributed the ashes over the fields and ponds. One big pond behind one of the crematoria has about three feet of ash at bottom. The sondercommandos lived about four months longer than the others. They threw the ashes on the fields home to many many little moles who push up ash when they dig through their tunnels. So that’s how it is now.

Any closed society is liable to promote cruelty; this is well documented. Situations like this engender inhuman behaviour. Many The camp was a daily venue for cruel and sadistic treatment of helpless people.
people abuse their authority and power against the vulnerable and helpless. In other situations, the intent is to punish, change, reeducate or control. In this case, the intent was to annihilate.

I imagine nazis marching women and children up from the selection site to the gas chambers. The intent to completely destroy them not for what they had done but simply because of who they were. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is still alive and well in Europe. So, it's confusing.

One night, we went to the Franciscan Monastery to view the artwork and hear the Holocaust testimony of Marian Kolodziej. He was imprisoned at Auschwitz when he was 17 years old.

It was a highlight. After a day at Birkenau we went in the middle of the dark night to the monastery. It was like something out of a novel really. His truthfulness and clarity were extremely winning. It was really an affirmation of life. Like the repair I saw with other group members. I think that made the whole trip very affirming— even the annoying parts of the trip were so buoyed up by the affirming parts that they actually didn't go deep at all. So, I'm glad I went to see Marian.

On the last night of the Retreat, the leader asked the large group to give support to a small faction of group leaders and participants who wanted to read the names of nazis on the Birkenau site, the same way that we had been reading the names of those murdered by them. A heated discussion took place between the members of the Retreat group.

The suggestion of reading the Nazi names was just stupid. It was good intentions of the leader gone array. They should have known better and drawn the boundary. Emotionally, I left the group at that moment. Luckily, the large group staggered through it without becoming violent. I thought, these bloody Germans and Poles— they're up against it. I wouldn't want to get in bed with any of
them, but they're doing the best they can it seems to me. I don't have any hard feelings about them. Oddly enough—you could say, that I did end up forgiving people myself. In terms of my own inner work, I feel alright about what I did. I wasn't trapped or helpless there. So, I left and that's alright.

We caught the night train from Krakow to Berlin. We arrived in the early morning. I came into the city with a new set of eyes. Berlin looked different to me after Auschwitz. I found myself less interested in and tolerant of the germans than I was two weeks before. So that was interesting.

We went to a memorial service in a Protestant church round the corner from our hotel in Berlin. Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass, happened on November 9, 1938 and is considered the beginning of the Holocaust. On Kristallnacht, the germans burned, broke, and looted Jewish synagogues, homes, and businesses; several Jews were killed. The service we went to took place in German. Half way through the lecture, they showed a slide of Palestinians. I didn't like the anti-Israeli sentiment that I encountered while I was at the Retreat. I want Jews to be loyal to and supportive of Israel—critical, yes, but loyal and supportive. To not sing the Israeli national anthem on a site where millions of Jewish people were murdered seems really twisted to me. When we were at the Kristallnacht memorial and the Palestinian slide came up Even though it was Protestant I assumed it was more of the same. We left immediately. I thought the germans were pointing the finger at Israel and saying, “See, we weren't so bad. Look how bad they are.” Maybe this was overdoing it but this is what I felt. So that was a shock to me.

Before leaving for home, the last place we visited in Berlin was the Jewish Museum. We had heard reports about the magnificent architecture and were excited to see it for ourselves. The Jewish museum in Berlin was a stunner. It was just void empty stark.
I just had to leave
and let it flow through me.
It caught me
on the raw from the camps,
it was like
getting dumped with a bucket of cold water
It was just too heavy.
It was really a statement
about the end of Berlin Jewry
about the loss,
about the entire catastrophe
This huge huge empty museum.
It wasn’t what I was expecting.
It was only later
That I could allow myself
to feel the pain
So, that was really shocking.

The next morning, on the flight from Frankfurt to Vancouver, I read Fritz Langer’s famous book on the Holocaust.

I realized
I was reading the book with completely new eyes.
I realized
that everything I had ever read, viewed, or listened to about the Holocaust would have to be reprocessed
I was in a completely different place about it
I had become religious about the Holocaust.
So, that was amazing.

There were many things that were important to me in terms of keeping myself together during the trip to the camps. Some things I set up before I left and others I did intuitively while I was there.

How did I cope?
It was all about people
I talked to my husband everyday—he connected me to my life outside the camps.
I shared a room with a friend—we talked about the days events.
My Canadian group was very very important—they helped me cope with the experience.
Our debriefing and drinking Polish Vodka—really saved my ass.
Although I did not connect much with one of the Canadian members—because she was new to me
I did connect with other Retreat participants and that was helpful, too.
I didn’t avoid whatever had to be seen and heard.
I noticed that the traumatization
My views about Germany and Poland have changed as a result of this trip to bear witness.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My views about Germany and Poland have changed as a result of this trip to bear witness.</th>
<th>Because I was raised to hate and fear the Germans, I went expecting to have those same feelings. Although I still have hard thoughts about some of the things that went on and are still going on, I no longer would just X the whole place out. For the vast proportion of the time I was filled with good feelings for everybody. I actually felt full of the milk of human kindness most of the time. So that was a surprise.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t overshadow the experience I saw it more as a very powerful and disturbing eye opener. I thought and felt more about the trauma of the prisoners than about my own. So, really, it was a wake up call.</td>
<td>I learned and relearned that I’m actually able to do very, very hard things. When I was very burned out by my work it created a lot of self-doubt. I was saying things to myself like “You’ll never be able to get back to work again” “You’re a loser” “You’ve screwed it up.” By being in the camps, I realized that in fact I am able to do very very hard stuff I’m not superwoman--I need rest--and that’s fine. I really got the whole thing in perspective. It sounds awful to say but--I went to a concentration camp and I’m the better for it, I am essentially alright. When the chips are down I can come through I’m a good human being So, that was very good and very affirming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is impossible to go to a site like the camps without something changing within. On this trip to the concentration camps of Europe, I learned much about myself in the process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To bear witness to such a catastrophe means that one cannot, with responsibility, remain unchanged by it, nor retreat from doing something about it. Bearing witness is all about being responsible. Once you’ve held that space, seen those things, been in the position where you’re the one who can speak, you can’t just go about business as usual. I would like to speak out about my experience, learning, and understanding of the reality of the Holocaust; how it has affected our entire existence whether we have known it or not; and maybe even design a school or adult education curriculum.

Witnessing has made me clearer and clearer about exactly what happened to very real people. It has become really personal. That was the major change for me—taking it in on a very personal level. I mean when you talk about six million Jews being killed who can take that statistic in? Now, there is a very personal face for me on what was a very public event. So that’s very important.
KATHLEEN: Witnessing Poetry

Due to the nature of her life’s work, Kathleen has a history of witnessing trauma firsthand. Her earlier work involved travel into remote areas of the world where she assisted disadvantaged communities by providing healthcare services. Through her experiences in Africa and Asia, she has become a deeply committed and observant witness. Kathleen’s intense interest in the topic and site of research was clear from the beginning. Through word-of-mouth, she heard about my research and requested to be present during my proposal defense. At the completion of the defense, she signed up as a participant in the project.

Kathleen is a well-educated health professional in her early 50s, who is currently using her skills and knowledge in the post-secondary education field. Although she has no familial or cultural connections with the Jewish community or the Holocaust, Kathleen carries an interest in this massive act of violence for humanitarian reasons. Her life experiences as a firsthand witness combined with her practices in the Christian tradition have motivated her to act for equality and compassion.

As with the other participants, I conducted two interviews with Kathleen—one before leaving Vancouver for the Retreat and one after our return. We had two conversational dialogues about the performance experience and her views about my interpretive story. Along with a set of photographs taken specifically for the study, she offered me her personal travel journal. As well, Kathleen’s enthusiastic and supportive contribution to the witnessing performance offered us the opportunity for frequent informal conversations.

I wrote Kathleen’s story in the form of narrative poetry. This genre reflects the many freely rendered poems in her journal and the very poetic way she has of speaking in conversation. As I listened to and read about her thoughts and feelings in the various texts available to me, it seemed as if she was constantly attempting to find a way to weave the reality of shadows, struggle, and despair into the beauty of language—never quite letting the darkness lead the reader into hopelessness. In this way, I found myself easily following her through her pristine metaphors and evocative structure.

As a guide for the reader, each of the three columns is complete unto itself. Each column should be read in its entirety (i.e., 12 pages in length) before going on to the next column. For example, in the first run-through of the poem, the column labeled “BEFORE” is read on each of the 12 pages before moving on to the next column “DURING.” The final section written in **bold italics** is the last piece to read. Capitalization (or lack thereof) indicates the positioning of the storyteller.
Here is Kathleen’s story:

**BEFORE**

first image—
holocaust remembrance week.
sitting alone in the film theatre
me
sitting behind myself
seeing my own silhouette
head and shoulders
watching
feeling really impacted
feeling compelled
to see
as much as I could see.

I’ve always thought
that I should be
saying something
or doing something
because
I’ve seen something
by watching those films
but
never really feeling able
or never really feeling
I had the right
to really speak up
because
I am a non-jew
I don’t know enough
I have
no authority
I’m not allowed
to express
a strong opinion.

getting ready
I am quite constrained.
I am a tight contained desire
to go out and see
I feel
an incredible responsibility
as part of humanity
for what happened.

**DURING**

in Berlin
heart strings pulled so
tight up through her chest
it sunk
inwards
seeing her(s)
my chest fills
and
is heavy.

**AFTER**

ever so slightly
I’m almost ignoring
the experience
of the camps
just a bit
I’m feeling relieved
I don’t feel as bad
as I felt
when I left.

I feel ungrounded
but
more grounded than I thought I
would be
I feel slower than normal
things take me forever to do
I feel unaffected by pressures
can’t get geared up
I feel really happy
when
I don’t have to see anybody
I feel pleasure
in the simplicity
of wiping my counters
doing my laundry
I feel quieter
and not as reactive
people have noticed and
commented
I feel able
to recall visual images
and readily move back
to the camps
I feel...
I don’t know if blunted
is quite the right word
when
we met as a group
the other night
and that left me feeling
very emotional.

*tears fall
from the flames
into the ash.*
I can only go look and feel the suffering I can only get in touch with that part of my own humanity. it is a strong driving force which is actually a pipeline to my own sorrow in my own life.

my drive to witness is related to family silences our huge vein of secrecy family secrets and both of my parents were in the war but never talked about it mom only talked about stories that were fun there's a connection about wanting to go to auschwitz to see things hear the truth know the truth so I can understand the dark things the evil go towards it see it then I will have a reference point for the good for the light

hearing anti-semitic comments from friends I remember feeling really shocked and offended but not able to voice it

out like hearts the same 19 memorialized on a shooting gallery wall black butt ends staring out keep out.

how could “not much there” strike me as so big so terrible so haunting so deadly here at the end of an ordinary street in an ordinary town i feel myself holding tension in my gut wanting to cross my arms and hold myself it isn’t the cold that makes me hold on.

burnt wood arson Jewish barracks in Sachsenhausen peeling back layers of paint, varnish in these rooms lived, suffered tortured men murdered i can imagine the horrors here i want to cover my face retreat it took my voice away i’m shutting down falling asleep.

prison cold, walls whitewashed the cells clean, empty the place is eerie

when I witnessed firsthand in africa and asia I came back quite traumatized my feeling of safety in the world was really jeopardized when I witnessed secondhand in the concentration camps I never felt unsafe but notice that I feel different my perspectives on things has shifted slightly I’m not really overwhelmed with gratitude for my life but I’m aware of the privilege of life I’m aware that I need to speak about the camps do something with this witnessing experience do something different in my work life I sense a changing but nothing’s urgent I don’t have a sense of urgency about it.

what’s interesting to me is for the first time in a very long time I’m not putting myself down I’m not forcing myself to think, write, journal, read, do I’m just letting myself have my experience. and so that’s a shift for me.

I’m having really unusual dreams I know it’s the same one the same tone
my own anger and indignation about it silenced so, I have to go I need to go I must go.

I watched films, read, talked to people, notice peoples reactions when I say what I’m doing there is something about the picture on the brochure that completely fixed it for me I knew there would be no turning back.

I somehow have a sense when I read something, and talk to people the subject of the holocaust creates a hush I feel a hush. from me from everybody.

I’m very easily silenced in voice it comes from a question do I deserve to exist? this question is intimately tied to the holocaust story.

will I be a good enough witness? I am going for my own personal reasons I am going for social reasons am I worthy of the journey?

when I first thought of going full of a presence i feel myself become cold inside as in the cold got into me i find myself holding shoulders up hallow breathing i see the flowers twined to the iron bars blocking the entrance to the cells where photographs names, candles identify a person who was imprisoned there men loved men fathers partnered men sons brothers

transition by train night trains cold dark misty trains that transported people to their deaths rocking loud sounds of rails and wheels anxious sounds in eastern Europe.

Warsaw my stereotype of eastern Europe cold, hard no beauty utilitarian lines pigeons red letters scattered crowded old coats no scent of welcome except repeating I’m in the camps or I’m on the trip I keep being in it I wake up wondering why am I still there? its not a frightening dream just perplexing each night I go back to sleep I’m astonished here I am again. I’m so full and so empty like the birkenau site.

I learned self protection is a good thing not a bad way of being it is good to have a separation when I’m full of trauma.

I was surprised by the struggle with being on the inside or the outside of the group surprised at its power over me a sensitivity in my life a duality if I’m this— I’m not that be it introvert–extrovert emotional–non-emotional new friend–old friend good witness–bad witness jew–non-jew christian–non-christian so many layers it blew me away it created a distance from the experience for me.

at the execution wall
to auschwitz
I feared
that by witnessing
I might
move into depression
now
the fears are gone
I’m noticing
sadness
in letting that fear go
but
I’m not afraid
of going to auschwitz
anymore
I’m not scared
I’m not afraid
to be seen
and see
witnessing is about
seeing
and being seen
now
I am free
to witness fully.

being
the “good enough” witness
is about
my ability to
see the truth
my ability to
trust what I see
my ability to
speak about it
and
not doubt myself
not doubt my explanations
not doubt my own voice
not doubt my perspective
not doubt my thoughts
not doubt my viewpoint
and
express what I see
so others can hear

what’s important is that
I go
I feel
I see

from a panhandler
a flushed, peasant-faced
persistent
driver-crazy woman
angry
expectant.

Treblinka
the way of death
this way to the gas
beautiful
sorrowful place.

forests
strangely
filled with ghosts
the wind
shaking
the rounded leaves
seasons turning
time moving,
life in cycles
i imagine people
in the woods
escaping
asleep, cold, wounded,
hiding
for their lives.

walking
onto the cement covered
ashes
walking
among the 17,000 stones
sorrow
raising up
from my boots
seeping
into my body
dead
all in one day
all in one day

i can never capture
or describe
the experience of
Treblinka
i see
a single little

I was just going through the
motions
like
I was a guest
at the kaddish
I was a guest
at the zen buddhist chanting
I was a guest
at the catholic prayer
a bystander
on the outside
feeling quite self conscious
shy and out of place
not fully belonging
I got so wrapped up in that
I couldn’t really
witness the wall
maybe
I was full
of all I had seen of the artifacts
and the auschwitz prison
that I could not fully witness
the wall
and what happened there
I became quite self preoccupied
felt awkward
trying to figure out
what to do
it shut me down
from looking out
because
it became more of a looking in
wondering how to relate
it shut down my own discerning
thinking
because
so much of witnessing
is about taking it in
relating it to what I have read
and understood
I was thinking
this is the execution wall
at auschwitz
in poland
I’m not just standing anywhere
in the world
between two red brick buildings
so
to really bear witness
I validate
my own experience.

it would be selfish
to go
to auschwitz
and not be able to share it
in some way
because
as well as for personal reasons
I am also
going for social reasons
what I am going to see
is really about
all of humanity

I see witnessing
as being an act of hope
shedding light,
bringing out the truth
it’s reparative
it’s reassuring
by witnessing
I am not participating
in illusion
I am not participating
in secrets and lies
I am not
just standing by
I feel really responsible
as a person
with resources and energy,
to go
outside of my comfort zone
to keep me on the path
of good
to keep me conscious
and awake
in this way
witnessing creates meaning

I have tried to prepare myself
but
there is an old pattern
I slip into
it’s that
I can never be informed enough
I can never know enough
I can never read enough

it seems
that I have to be really in the
moment
and not worry
about whether or not
I’ve stepped out of line
I have to be totally there
separate from my worries
about the group
otherwise
I won’t be able to trust
what I’m seeing for myself
because
I’d be witnessing
the way I think
others are witnessing
or
making self-judgments
about how
I am seeing
and understanding
what I am witnessing
this experience
makes me think
about
how important
group safety
must be
in bearing witness
with a group.

even though
I didn’t feel any entitlement
to grieve
the atrocities
in the camps
because
I am a christian
I was in deep sorrow
at treblinka
I felt self-conscious and
cautious
about speaking about it
because
there was some
anti-christian sentiment
expressed
in our group
so when
I can never see enough
yet
I have this sense deep down
inside myself
that I do understand things.
so
I made a commitment to go

I have
told a few people
especially
my close associate
who
shines the light of love
on me
that was very affirming
grounding
she helped me
confirm
my own resources
strengths
and ways of coping
that’s been good
also
I watched videos
the shoah series
I noticed
my tendency to dissociate
I was able to
recognize what I was doing
I was
protecting myself
recognizing my own defenses
I need them
it really feels wonderful to be
approaching something
knowing really clearly
when I put up my defenses
when I am simply in grief
when I am simply feeling
one emotional or another
it has been
a revisiting and relearning
of strength and self-care.
I did fear
that I was going to plummet
myself into despair
but I know now

pieces
that are left,
people can’t
put them together
in any way
that makes sense
a strong image
a reminder
of the chaos.

centre for Jewish culture
a painting
in the main hall
commemorates
“the black hole”
67 woman
imprisoned in a cell
measuring 8 by 12 feet
for 13 hours
resulting in
death and insanity
faces emerging
as the painting ages
in the nightmare
of the camps
how do I see
what’s there?
how do I see
what’s hidden?
in Auschwitz
the centre for dialogue
with myself
self-focused me
feeling slighted,
misunderstood,
over-tuned
to group dynamics
easily hurt
retreating inside
but
find myself
enticed out
of my ambivalence
and self-imposed
constraints
with
incense
candles

a Jewish member who
sees the nectar in life
gave permission
through a Jewish tradition
to leave the sorrow
I felt I could leave the guilt
move from the incredible
sorrow
that literally
came out of the ground
and up into my boots
I could acknowledge
that I was filled up with sorrow
and then move away from it
and be emotionally flexible
it was an incredibly profound
insight
a significant bridge for me
created by a Jewish person
a credible porter of ritual,
it was really significant--
a cracking of the stone in me.

I’ve got my photographs
I look at them
my intention
to capture
my experience
can be seen in the photographs
but
pretty early on
I became disheartened
about taking pictures
in birkenau
I felt
I just can’t capture this image
yet
I did
I captured the mood
the colours of birkenau
looking at the photographs
I can still imagine
how horrible
it must have been.

I was surprised
by my experience
on the train trip
out of berlin
I can get out of it.

I have been reading *ruins of memory* the author distinguishes between different kinds of memory and how they come out of experience it has been really helpful in understanding how I remember pieces of my own life I can’t fully articulate how but I know this reading has prepared me.

a helpful metaphor-- a woman sees her holocaust experience as being beside her encapsulated in a membrane that is tough and flexible so not to be overwhelmed she talks about making sure that the membrane does not become distorted and weakened in any way this helps to keep that time alive but not overwhelming.

anything that I read which gives me something new tells me another piece of the truth, another piece of the story is strangely supportive even personal accounts that I have to put down sometimes I prefer reading them than not reading them.

connections

*scene:* in Auschwitz

*Ola* (age 10):
mama,
why were they burning people?

*Mother:*
they made mistakes.

*Ola* (age 26):
i don’t understand.
i don’t understand.
how could she say that?

past ideas
broken down--

Auschwitz
red brick buildings smaller than expected

Birkenau
huge, vast, immense beyond my imagination one moment so real one moment so illusory evil

shifting from fully witnessing to withdrawal familiar smells cigarettes, moth balls ground me allow me to keep looking.

we see piles of human hair--1700 kilos gray now covered in dust traces of cyclon b the gas turns people’s hair gray skin purple maybe the hair cutting place was contaminated--why am i trying to explain the unexplained?

the piles of glasses makes me cry thousands

I was quite anxious from the moment we left the comforts of berlin I felt vaguely distressed it was a cold rainy night and waiting for the train was harsh and cold I was already tired the train itself was uncomfortable and thinking about where we were going what we were going into the uncertainty maybe I was wondering worrying like the prisoners had so long ago on these same tracks and trains.

I had an experience of feeling unsafe in the sachsenhausen camp to cope I tried to physically move away from the prison cells stop my imagination about the victim and his family I imagined a piece of glass that I rolled up like a car window a separation for safety still seeing but detaching I could feel the distance letting myself fall asleep trying to listen to a conversation between a father and his children something normal something safe
another thing that is incredibly helpful is listening to a tape with grounding exercises especially “anything that is inside of you that doesn’t feel good is not yours so just let it go just let it go.” it reminds me to just let it go.

also palates yoga being able to speak to my instructor’s projection she was really upset that I was putting myself in the way of suffering by talking it through we were able to work more effectively together it gave me more flexibility and my voice so that was very freeing.

and talking to you balancing the views of others telling people talking to them just to understand what is it we all see and how we all respond to it.

and quietly praying about it in church and asking for prayers.

I try to imagine myself there I imagine this small group I imagine myself approaching the group I’m still quite not in the group

in a twisted pile no more reading, seeing favourite pots for soups i imagine a woman thinking about relocating trying to take the best of her kitchen pile of shoes all laces gone dress shoes one lone child’s shoe navy, unworn, special who’s foot? i’m shocked it’s hopelessly depressing yet i’m riveted to witness.

in a photograph i met a woman a very beautiful young author she was Roma Sinti her story was very short--secretly writing and hiding a book from the nazis i filled in the gaps with my imagination the fear of persecution the circumstances her journal and letters describing atrocity suffering i visited her many times in Auschwitz in the cold wind of Auschwitz i heard stories about the cruelty around the cold nazis pulling people outside naked hosing them down an image

just pulling into myself I was also cold, that’s how I did it when I felt in danger in auschwitz I used my camera to help me when I was really getting quite overwhelmed seeing the large room full of people’s hair another of children’s shoes very very personal things I just started taking photographs because it gave me distance it gave me something to do rather than taking the reality of it in also, I stood back from the tour guide her voice was like a shot from a gun I felt assaulted with information it surprised me. I felt assaulted with her angry voice this is what it feels like to be touched by anger. I wanted to see but not be blinded.

more than in the auschwitz museum the physical place of birkenau stands out for me approaching and walking through those gates the place is so clearly imprinted in my mind even if I were to loss my memory I could recall the size that certain way the wind blows very ungentle very unforgiving
yet
I imagine walking around the
sites
I imagine us travelers
I imagine more and more
interactions
I imagine the light,
conversations, and warmth
but
when I imagine
100 people at the Retreat
I think
“how am I going to be there?”
“how am I going to belong?”
I think
“am I going to be too quiet?”
“how much should I interact?”
I hope
for times of silence
I just want
to be able to be myself.

I am
worrying
that the witnessing experience
will be exhausting
and
I won’t be able
to take anymore in
so
I want to feel alright
about taking time off
from witnessing
and
being free
to make
the right choices
for myself

I am worried about
my response
to group pressure
and
group momentum.

I worry about
taking photographs
it is a very old thing with me
I think

of a woman
naked
laying in the snow
her blackened hand
on her frozen belly
it’s very hard for me
to get
the images
out of my mind
as i walk, sit
in the cold wind
of the camps
with my wool and down
the cruelty is just...
everything, every single
horror
that was done
packed in layers
every single horror
in concurrent in layers
its unbe...
how would you even...
i try to imagine
how...
in this crowded place...
i am struck
by a sculpture
in Auschwitz
a prisoner
torn apart to form the
shape of a swastika
barbed wire
holding him together
filling his chest
connecting his limbs
when i think
of the people
who survived
i wonder
what had to happen
to them
inwardly
in order to
hold themselves together
to live.

another dream
i am leaping

and
walking on the ground
knowing what’s under all that
ground
and the worst
getting
and feeling familiar with a place
like that.

then there were the trees
something about the
shimmering
of light on the leaves
in the birch forests.
a real sadness
associated with the trees
the falling of the leaves
it taps into my own sorrow
in my own life
the autumn
filled with mixed feelings
a melancholy
a familiarity
both reassuring and alarming
it’s a lens
I saw the camps through
not being able to separate
the camps from the forests
the forests from my life
my life from the camps
the camps
from what’s familiar to me
very strange
very surprising

I met an older woman
in auschwitz
who was a hidden child
had a hidden voice
still hiding
from the “final solution”
I moved in and out
of being with her
in different ways
connecting through my
childhood to
her childhood
connecting through my
motherhood to
it's about being intrusive
I'll take them if
I'm really struck by something
if there's an image
that I really want to keep.
if it feels right
then
I will take a photograph.

I sometimes think of myself
as having a stone inside of me
I see it as grounded warmth
and
I see it as a hardness
in me.
I hope
this experience
will be a deep opening to
compassion
in myself for myself and others
an opening for forgiveness
and
a deeper and richer opportunity
for understanding about
what it means
to remember
to remember
those things in our own lives
to remember
who we are
to remember
about the possibilities of
human nature.

no matter what comes
it will be
a really good thing to do
my experiences in
angola and asia
witnessing firsthand
had a big impact on me.
what I saw
wasn't really good for me
but
I think
knowing
the real
will give me
more understanding

into the dark
no ground
i scream
i see myself jumping
wake up!
wake up!
ah!
' i'm here
friends in the room
in the darkness
of Auschwitz.

thinking about the horrific
killing of adults
thinking about those exact
same things
or worse with children
is...
very hard
to stay witnessing
for long
its beyond
any realm
of my imagination
how...how...how...
that was done
how...that happened
strong images...
stuck with me.

i say to myself
i have seen
this kind of thing before
as a firsthand witness
rotting legs
leprosy
i can stand it
i can handle it
yet i can't.

last night,
after witnessing
for many days
i had
a distressing dream.
when i woke
it was heavily
on my mind
i talked about it

her motherhood
connecting through my
womanhood to
her womanhood
connecting through my
personhood to
her personhood
we talked about the story
of her family in auschwitz
nazis murdered them all
she came to tell
the story of their lives
to take her voice out of hiding
to connect to her family
we talked about how to tell
about them
when she told
we were in the women's block
it was crowded
I only heard her voice
I heard her come out of hiding
to tell about her loss
after
she came and took my arm
I could see the glow
of pride
on her face
she is a model for me
a really nice story of connection

I noticed
when I knew I had to read the
names of people
who died at auschwitz-birkenau
I had a lot of anxiety.
I noticed
that the anxiety dissipated
when I experienced the daily
structure of the ritual itself
the calling to mediate
with the siren
the clashing of the stones
as the reading began
the calling of names
from the four corners
of the large circle of people
when I went to read
I was at ease
with the implicit norms
about life.

as I have been thinking about
going to auschwitz
I was hoping that
I might find a button
I imagine
this little fantasy
about
finding a button
and
sewing it inside my coat
where it would be safe
because
years ago
when I worked in thailand
a surgeon
gave me a bullet
that was taken out of the chest
of a khmer rouge soldier
the surgeon said
that I needed it as a reminder
of what we have been doing
I accepted it
because
I was there
doing something
and bearing witness
in going to auschwitz
I will also be
bearing witness
to the evidence
of the atrocities
I would like to carry a reminder
of that experience.

in the witnessing group
i took a big risk
i am personal
and emotional
in front of the group
unusual for me
i notice that my defenses
are way down
i know the darkness
in myself
is not black
like the perpetrators
the dream
brings me closer
to coming to reconciling
the darkness
in everybody
there is a lot of power
in human evils.

by feeling
at moments
touched by the shadow
within myself
and the dark sides
of humanity
i’m helped
to move
from self-flagellation
and sorrow
towards the light
in me
i can
hold them together
cross the boundary
between
one
and the other.

it is our last day
at the camp
i had almost forgotten
about wanting
to find a button
and today
walking from the pond
i found one
but
instead of taking it

of the group
I was unaware of anybody else
I simply read the names
it was calming
to be honouring the people
within the structure
of this powerful ritual.

during the more personal
canadian rituals
in the children’s barrack
of birkenau
I imagined
being with the children there
I was in the past
and in the present
at the same time
by
taking
a good parent role
thinking about their safety
in that very unsafe place
this small ritual
freed me up
helped me
be a part of
an interweaving
of past and present
a whole
witnessing experience.

when we were walking
back from the pond
I was looking at the ground
and
that’s when the button image
came back to me
I was thinking
I’m going to find a button
and then I did
I decided
it doesn’t matter what I find
I won’t take it home
I don’t need a legacy
from this trip
the button from a prisoner
in auschwitz
is a big responsibility
to carry
I want to tell people who ask about my experiences of witnessing in the concentration and extermination camps. I want to be unambiguous about my own learning so I can tell the story clearly. I want to bring the lessons forward so as not to repeat personal and social mistakes of the past. I want to be more visible in social action and make a stronger attempt to combine my head, heart, and hands. I can see myself as an active group member in putting a performance together that conveys a strong message about the atrocities in the camps.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Collective Story: Vicariously Witnessing Together

Our Need to Testify

The impact of our vicarious witnessing experience in the concentration camps catalyzed the group member’s desire to stand together as representatives and make known the evidence of the atrocities of the camps as we saw and vicariously experienced them. During a social gathering upon our return from Europe, we discussed our individual goals for future action. In the course of the conversation, all the participants jointly decided to work towards some kind of public presentation. The idea of a performance piece was bantered around and I volunteered to write a script that compiled the voices of all participants from transcribed interviews and other research documents. This opportunity allowed me the chance to look at narrative instances between the texts of individual participants. While writing the script I interwove significant textual interactions into the body of the performance. For example, leaving the gates of Sachsenhausen one of the members who is Jewish was pushed out the gate and treated with disrespect while another member who is Christian was warmly greeted and given well wishes as she was leaving.

The performance—*Witnessing in European Concentration Camps: A Dramatic Reading against Racism*—focused on our experiences in the camps as individuals and as a group. I spent many weeks sorting through the various narrative texts of all participants, including myself. I looked for narrative instances where our experiences showed divergence, parallelism, interconnection, and enmeshment. I carefully selected instances and sculpted them together from my own perspective to create a shared story of vicarious witnessing. I compiled the words and perspective of the five participants into three distinct voices—the voice of feeling, thinking, and action. This means that the readers were not only speaking their own words, but also those of others. At one meeting, I mentioned that I was including the shadow voice of racism in the reading. The group immediately contributed actual comments that were directed to them of which I added to the script. With permission from the interviewing journalist, I also recorded and transcribed the media recording of racist comments directed at the Jewish population by David Ahenakew, a former chief of the Assembly of First Nations and a member of the Order of Canada. The interview with Mr. Ahenakew took place shortly after we arrived back from the camps and had a particularly devastating impact on me personally. My intention in using these shadow voices was to interface them with our present day and archival photographs of the
camps, camp victims, and Nazi resisters. This tension between the racist comments and the visual impact of the consequences of those attitudes was an impactful aspect of the reading.

In addition to the script itself, I was also highly engaged in attempting to externalize the experience of vicariously witnessing in the camps myself. Part of this process involved the creation of two sculptures—one depicting the deep anguish that I experienced by witnessing in the camps and the other a sense of resolution that can take place in the social alliance of a group of vicarious witnesses. Without an original intention to include them, these sculptures became a central visual component of the reading. Along with situating them on the stage during the performance, I also had two black and white photographs of the sculptures made into large posters that we placed on the solid black backdrop of the stage.

As a key aspect of the process, I invited all participants to read, and approve the content and form that I chose for the script. After the first reading, participants were very pleased, suggesting only a few very minor changes. For example, I ended the first draft with a quote from an American civil rights leader. One member suggested I replace it with a quote from a local individual. In the end, I wrote an original statement. Participants also voluntarily and enthusiastically agreed to act as speakers in the reading. As an ethical precaution, I constructed a consent to participate form specifically for the performance, which all participants signed.

After many weeks of intense work on my part with essential assistance from some of the group members we created the technical components (i.e., a PowerPoint presentation with sound and slides) and supporting documents such as an advertisement, introductory address, evaluation form, and a program with two inserts that included statistical information about the camps (see Appendix D). Because the performance was part of my research project, I constructed an evaluation form for the audience and set up group facilitators to run a discussion group at the end of the performance. This material will be used in further research, so I will not be addressing the issues in this text. Finally, there were a number of practices with assistance and coaching from a professional actor. Up until the last moment, we were struggling to form the script into a living reality. With our set built and ready, and our lines familiarized, we stepped into the spotlight and performed our shared vicarious witnessing experience.

Here is our story.
Witnessing in European Concentration Camps: 
A Dramatic Reading against Racism

Setting
Stage is set with 2 posters on a black fabric backdrop at the rear of the stage, 2 divider screens draped in black cloth on the left, and a slide screen draped with black fabric on the right. In mid stage are three stools draped in black fabric. On both the left and right sides of the stools are two small tables. Each table is draped in black with a sculpture sitting on top. At the front of the stage, there is a line of unlit candles and a sculpture in the centre of the line. Dim lights are on until the Narrator enters.

Patrice: (enter from the main door and speak at center stage) I was the first witness. The journey started for me when I came across a small brochure from an International Buddhist group called the Peacemaker Community. This group invited participants from around the world to join an annual Bearing Witness Retreat in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland. Because I have a strong interest in understanding people's experience of vicariously witnessing traumatic events, I decided that witnessing in the concentration camps of Germany and Poland would be extremely important. In the ruins of the camps, I hoped that I might be able to live the experience of vicarious witnessing along with others, as we tried to piece together the traumatic story of this unspeakable tragedy. Tonight, I invite you to hear our story. (sit in front row with audience)

Speaker 1: (enter from the back left side and stand there as you speak) Here it is, a year and a half later, and our group from Vancouver gets ready to bear witness in four different concentration camps in Germany and Poland including Auschwitz-Birkenau with the Bearing Witness Retreat.

Speaker 2: (enter from the left side, stand there and speak) I wonder what it will be like to be a part of this multifaith group from Vancouver. I know we will experience our differences as we move through this very intense journey.
When I tell people that I am going to Auschwitz and that I have no Jewish connection, they don’t understand why I want to go. I also get mixed reactions from people—mostly curious, some resentment, and even once anger. After that, I found myself not saying where I was going anymore.

The notion of other—other as evil—the other that could have sent me to the concentration camps because I am Jewish. I know I am not other to that. In Hebrew, there is an expression, when we speak of non-Jews the words is “goyim” which really means other. But I am also the other, and that is what I am trying to embrace as much as is possible.

It is very important to me that non-Jews are going. It surprises me to discover that I long for this support. Is this a weakness in me? Why should I care what non-Jews think?

I remember last year being at some friends who are Jewish. The Holocaust came up and several people made comments about how long do we have to remember; I felt it was said thoughtlessly. I remember feeling really shocked and offended, but still not able to voice my feelings because I am not Jewish. That makes me wonder if I will be a good enough witness, knowing that I am going for my own personal reasons. Am I worthy of the journey?

What side will the goyim be on? Will they support the Jews or will they be on a forgiveness trip with the Nazis?

As I prepare, I know that I am going with trepidation about the dynamics of the group itself and how I will fare amidst it all.

Because I usually travel alone it will be a challenge for me to be in this group. Will I fit in or will I remain an outsider?
**Speaker 3:** I will be traveling in an intimate situation with this group, so I feel hesitant and anxious. I don’t know what I’d do if I or someone else has a debilitating or traumatizing experience.

**Speaker 1:** Trauma isolates—I am used to coping and doing things alone so this is a challenge to come together to do this. There’s just an incredible pull to go back to my room and try to do it by myself. It is something that I will struggle with during the trip.

**Speaker 2:** I wonder why I want to go back. This will be my second time; it took me over a year to recover from my last trip. I can’t articulate why I want to go back, but I know I need to go. On my first trip, I didn’t perform any rituals, and I didn’t have the opportunity to debrief what I saw and experienced. I didn’t work through it. I just came back with this terrible case of posttraumatic stress. In a way, I think it’s unfinished business.

**Speaker 1:** Trauma has made me resilient and strong but it has also made me open, so I just don’t know what will come in.

**Speaker 3:** I just don’t know what to say. I can’t imagine what it will be like or what my experiences will be. I don’t know how I will respond to others or even be with others. I don’t really want to think about it cause I just don’t know. Actually, I’m scared. I’m scared of going there.

**Speaker 1:** I see going to witness the camps as being an act of hope because shedding light, or putting my eyes on things has a way of bringing out the truth which is so reparative no matter how bad it is. By going there and taking it in, I will no longer participate in illusion, secrets, and lies. It’s an opportunity to go outside of my comfort zone and if I do that, there will be some ripples somewhere.

**Shadow:** It never happened; the Jews made the whole thing up.
Speaker 2: One of my friends said “You’re crazy going to a place like that and sticking your nose in evil.” And I said, “I need to put my nose in evil lest I forget the evil within me.”

Speaker 1: (walk forward and stand in front of center chair) The role of vicarious witness is very, very important especially to concretize the fact that something has happened, to face it, and grapple with it. What I see will affect me differently than how it affects others. Witnessing triggers or generates the opportunity to look at parts of myself and my perspective. I can acknowledge, face, see—literally see—something for real, but perhaps even more importantly pulling something out about myself.

Speaker 2: (Stands beside Speaker 1.) How can we prepare for this journey together? What can we put in place to support each other?

Speaker 1: Saturday, I invite the group for a prayer in the Or Shalom Synagogue. (Speaker 3 walk forward and stand beside Speaker 1.) “T’filat Ha’derech” which is a prayer for travelers. It is a prayer for those of us going, both Jews and non-Jews. I will invite people to bring forward names of people murdered in the Holocaust for us to read at the Retreat. I have prepared a special prayer book to hold the names.

Speaker 3: Sunday, I invite the group for prayers at Christ Church Cathedral. The minister has prepared a sermon that includes us all. I will invite people to bring forward names of people murdered in the Holocaust for us to read at the Retreat.

Speaker 2: (walk forward and stand in front of right chair) I am not a religious person at all and never perform any rituals, but maybe I will find some value in these rituals. Maybe they will have a healing effect. (Turn head and speak to Speaker 1) I will see you Thursday in Berlin.

Speaker 1: (Turn head and speak to Speaker 2) I will see you Thursday in Berlin.

Speaker 3: (Turn head and speak to Speaker 1) I will see you Thursday in Berlin.
Patrice:  (All speakers sit down as I walk to center stage) Our families, friends, and spiritual companions honoured and blessed our journey. It gave us the strength and unity to pack our bags and begin our journey to Europe.  
• I remember last minute worries and thoughts that we shared together. (group turns on chairs and face towards slide screen, I walk back to seat in audience)  

Speaker 1:  (turn head to speak to audience) My family brought me up after the war to hate and fear the Germans, to hate anything to do with them. I don’t know how I will be among them, to hear German and Polish spoken.  

Speaker 2:  (turn head and speak to audience) I wish I could have the same belief that some people have that things will work out. I just don’t have that belief. I’m not able to say things will work out because things did not work out for many members of my family. Things did not work out for millions of people then and are still not working out for millions of people now. Why I am going back?  

Speaker 3:  (turn head and speak to audience) I don’t know if I’m prepared. I could never have enough information, never know enough, never read enough, never see enough. Yet, I have this sense within me that I understand something very deeply.  

Patrice:  (All speaker turn on chair to face the audience as I walk to center stage) After a long flight, we arrive in Berlin. We find our hotel and eat a satisfying dinner that helps us have a good nights rest. In the morning, we explore the Jewish district in Berlin. Then, we get on a train that arrives at the first concentration camp just North of the city—Sachsenhausen. • Sachsenhausen started out as a camp for political prisoners and eventually degraded into a death camp for all types of prisoners. It was a staggering initial experience. (I walk back to seat in audience)  

Speaker 3:  Didn’t the woman at the Jewish centre in Berlin say there was “nothing” at Sachsenhausen? Here is the entrance at the end of a normal street. I can see through the fence that it is huge.
We are in a bookstore just before the gates of the camp itself. The woman working here is incredibly rude and unhelpful; it makes me angry. I feel insulted by her attitude. I wonder if she knows I'm Jewish?

After looking at the memorial sculptures that represent all of the countries where prisoners came from, I go to the museum that is just outside of the camp gates. It is full of stories about survivors and there is a display about the resistance. I notice myself hesitating to go through those gates.

The woman in Berlin said that there was nothing here, nothing, what could she possibly mean by nothing? I am looking at barracks, gas chambers, and photographs of horrors that happened here. I keep saying "I can't imagine," yet I am imagining many things--fragments of horrible scenes in my mind that fill in the gaps to the stories I read. Can my imagination stretch enough to cover the extent of this horror?

I'm in the Sachsenhausen prison barracks, about halfway down the hall. It feels dangerous in here to me. I notice that I've started not to go so close to the cells. I am trying to just focus on the memorials and the flowers that are in some of the cells. Oh, even that I find distressing because now I have a face, a name, and a family; that makes it even worse. Alright, don't think about the people; don't construct one of those personal stories. I just have to get out of here. I'm just going to keep walking down towards that end. I am at the end of the hall, I have to look back down this horrible stone cold hallway. I am looking back at this place of torture--the image burns into my mind.

As I am listening to you describing your experience, I am imagining myself pushing into those cells, lying on the cold hard dirt floor, and feeling the anguish of what I imagine happened here. What is it that drives my mind to want to know the depths of this terrible story?
Shadow: It's just history. Get real and stop your bellyaching. Just get over it!

Speaker 1: I see a sculpture of an older woman with sagging breasts. She has a quasi-blank look on her face; she appears strained, used. She looks like she would have been one of the older woman. I notice the life lines, what this kind of life carved out of her. She seems so small and so tiny as I am looking at her. Yet, she is still so upright—she is upright and her head is up—held high. I am really struck by that. It is a very strong image for me.

Speaker 3: I feel an incredible responsibility as part of the human race for what happened here. I feel helpless because the only thing that I can do is look, imagine the suffering, and to just try to get in touch with that part of my own humanity. I didn’t know it was a death camp.

Speaker 2: I go into the building where the doctors did medical experiments. It is terrifying to stand here and know some of the stories about what happened on that cold white tiled table. There is a thick feeling of evil in here.

Speaker 1: Hours and hours have gone by. It is getting dark already. I go to the gate to order a cab. The woman there shouts at me to get out because the gates are closing. She shoves me out the gate. What the Hell?!

Speaker 3: I am late getting to the gate. I see my friends waiting in the cab. The woman at the gate smiles at me as I pass. I wonder if it is because I’m a non-Jew, like her?
Patrice: (group turns on chairs and face towards the piano screens as I walk up to center stage) With the experience of Sachsenhausen heavy on our hearts, we take an overnight train out of Berlin with an end destination of Warsaw. From there, we visit the Warsaw Ghetto and the second camp, the killing centre of Treblinka. (I walk back to seat in audience)

Speaker 3: (Turn only head towards audience) I am feeling quite anxious as we leave Berlin. It is such a contrast to be here on this train after leaving the comfort of the smoky pub where we were drinking beer, and eating those fat sausages and mustard. It has a vague uncomfortable feeling about it. It is a cold, misty, rainy night. Waiting for the train was cold on that platform. I am already tired and the train berths themselves aren’t that comfortable. I am trying to find my way into the comfortable rhythm of the moving train--but there is no comfort here. I find myself thinking about where and what we are going to next--the uncertainty of it settles into me.

Speaker 1: (Turn only head towards audience) I want to have the experience of going in and out of Poland on the train. Although we could never know what it was like for the millions of people that were transported during the war, I want to ride the same tracks, even the same trains as those that were murdered here. It’s hard to sleep.

Shadow: ● The Jews weren’t transported in cattle-cars, they went on the normal train--first class some of them--and they complain!

Speaker 2: (Turn only head towards audience) Here I am, rolling along on a Polish train. How strange that I feel a sense of peace and even joy. Is it because I remember my train rides across Canada as a kid? I’m enjoying the movement, the sound of the old rusty train, having a Berth to myself, but I’m in Poland, where 3 million Jews were murdered!
Speaker 1: It’s light already. (group turns towards audience) We re-pack quickly and get off the train. (all stand) There’s a lone man on the platform with a sign that has a name on it resembling the name of someone in our group. Oh-he is here to drive us around Warsaw and to Treblinka! We get in his van and drop our bags at the hotel, eat some breakfast, and prepare to go to the camp. (together everyone walks around the back of the chairs and stands behind their own chair)

Speaker 2: The Nazis wanted to hide this camp because it was solely an extermination camp. People were transported here only to be murdered. The signage at the site reads that there were 800,000 people murdered on this site, at peak times up to 1000 people an hour and 17,000 people in a day. Near the end of the war, the camp and the train tracks were dismantled and all indication of it removed. Nazi’s planted lupines and built a house on the site to make it look like a country farm, like the countryside around it. When knowledge of its existence and what happened there was recognized and the site investigated, a large memorial was erected ● 17,000 stones are here—it is overwhelming to stand among them.

Speaker 3: I am circling around in the stones of Treblinka and feel the sorrow raising up from my boots into my heart. ● Tears are streaming down my face. I keep thinking—this happened all in one day, all in one day, all in one day. Its staggering.

Shadow: ● What right do you have to be upset about what happened? You're not even Jewish!
Speaker 2:

Although most of the stones have no names because the Nazi's did not keep track of who they murdered here, there are some stones with the names of towns where people came from. *Here is the stone with the name of my family's town—the town from which they were transported to their death. I believe from the research that I have done that my family was murdered here. One of our group members brings out coloured stones and a candle to help me honour them. I am very touched by her kind thoughts. We are silent together.*

Speaker 3:

I feel shy and self-conscious around the grief and loss of two of our group members as we stand at this powerful memorial. I am struggling with a sense of what my place is among the group. I am aware of how my membership in the oppressing culture would have kept me safe from all this horror in war times. I experience a sense of shame and at the same time anger and protectiveness for my Jewish friends. I worry about their safety here. These are new experiences for me as I try to locate myself in this very difficult place.

Speaker 2:

But I don't want protection. I hate it when Jews are seen only as victim. I really hate that. The Jews weren't just victims, they were also resistance fighters and they resisted in so many different ways. *Let's not forget that!*
We have arrived in Warsaw and go to the Ghetto area. I feel emotionally and physically exhausted. We see memorials commemorating the ghetto fighters and Jews that were transported to Treblinka and other concentration camps. The memorial that stands out for me is the orphanage run by Dr. Janusz Korczak. He stood as a true shield and protector of orphaned children. When he could no longer keep the children from being transported to Treblinka, he told the children they were going on a parade having them dress up and carry flags and banners so they wouldn’t be frightened. He went to his death in the gas chamber with the children because he wouldn’t leave them. This story really touches me, moves me. The courage of that man, his devotion, compassion, generosity.

In Warsaw, I find myself enjoying the Polish people and the sound of their language. I am not in touch with the hate I was raised to feel for this place. I feel all right here.

Because we had an experience of being on the Polish night train—old, small, tattered, and worn. We decide to treat ourselves by spending an extra five or ten dollars for a first class ride from Warsaw to Krakow. We are on the platform in Warsaw, and are having a hard time figuring out where the train is coming in. We see it and run in a panic to find our car, sitting down in the small compartment. It is grubby; I guess this is first class in Poland.

We get off and walk on the platform along side the train pulling our luggage behind us. Look—there is another car on the same train with our ticket numbers on it—oh my! The seats are clean, brightly coloured, and comfortable looking—and it’s our first class cabin. We were so disorientated that we missed it!
Patrice: (come up to center stage, group faces audience) The humour of our mistake helped carry us along, as we arrived in Krakow to join the participants in the Bearing Witness Retreat. The retreat began with a tour of the old Jewish quarters, Kazimierz, and a small museum in the Krakow ghetto. Later in the day, as we registered for the retreat, a distressing situation arose where our group was divided into two separate locations for sleeping and eating. (returns to seat)

Speaker 2: In the Krakow museum, I take a picture of a photo of a woman marching off to work with her shovel in the Warsaw ghetto. I am wondering what it was like for her. I find that I can’t imagine what it must have been like. I really can’t imagine what it must have been like for any of them. My mind kind of stops at a certain point and I can’t get beyond that. I’m not capable of that kind of imagination.

Speaker 1: (Speaker 3 turns away, Speaker 1 stands) I have noticed the way we as a group place ourselves among one another; what we choose to attend to, the way we arrange ourselves at the tables, who we walk with, who is listened to, who decides. I am aware of a space between us, a separation, a difference. I wonder if I should bring up my feelings with the rest of the group. (walk around back close to Speaker 2)

Speaker 3: At the end of our tour of Krakow, we go into a Jewish museum that has remnants of religious paraphernalia before the war. I notice that the Jewish members only come in for a few minutes and then go to lunch. After I look at a number of the displays, I notice that I am feeling more obligated than interested; obligated because I am an outsider and feel like it is my duty to see what this culture has once been.
**Speaker 2:** Being separated into the two locations for eating and sleeping will make our connecting more difficult. Without knowing, the organizers have arranged for all of our Jewish members to be in one center and the non-Jews to be in the other. With some negotiation, the best we manage is getting a mixed group of four members into one room at one center and at the other center, two will share a room together and one will share with a stranger. The process of negotiation sets up a dynamic that separates the Canadians from the large group. This holds for the duration of the retreat.

**Patrice:** (sit on empty middle chair facing towards audience) We officially begin the retreat with an initial tour of the Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. In a very small way, we attempt to experience camp life by having responsibility for carrying a small bowl in order to receive our daily midday meal of soup and bread. Routinely, we participated in a small group meeting to talk about our experiences before breakfast, and a large group meeting after supper called the Bearing Witness circle. In both the morning and afternoon, we were free to join other participants in a large circle on the Birkenau selection site, where we meditated or prayed and read the names of people murdered in the camps followed by multifaith services. One evening, we went to the Franciscan Monastery to hear the Holocaust testimony and view the artwork of Marian Kolodziej, a survivor of the Auschwitz camp. (Speaker 1 turns towards screen, Speaker 3 stands and turns towards screen, Speaker 2 turns towards screen, Patrice moves to sculptures)

**Shadow:** (Ahenakew) The Jews owned, damn near owned all of Germany prior to the war. That's how Hitler came in and he was going to make damn sure that the Jews didn’t take over Germany or Europe. That's why he fried 6 million of those guys. You know?
Speaker 2: (Pause 8 seconds, stand up, Speaker 3 moves back a step) I am feeling really shocked right now. (Pause, Speaker 2 stands up.) We are introduced to Auschwitz by viewing an archival film of the liberation of the Dachau camp. Thousands and thousands of starved corpses piled into mass graves. It seems so unbelievable—I am shaken by the massive evil that perpetrated this horror on so many people. Although I’ve been here before, I am alarmed anew. (All speakers look towards Speaker 2. Speaker 2 sits on right hand chair.) Name: Chaya, Pessy, Sima, and Mier Rozen

Speaker 1: (Speaker 3 goes to look at slide, Speaker 1 sits down on middle chair) When I was in a Jewish summer camp during my adolescence, they had a day of fasting called “Tisha B’Av” which isn’t specifically about the holocaust, but the holocaust is brought in and it certainly was in that camp. We read “The Night” by Ellie Wiesel and we read and talked about some of the children’s poetry from the Warsaw ghetto. We were 15-16 years old fasting and remembering the holocaust—that was very powerful experience for me. To imagine what it would have been like to have been one of those people. That was probably one of the first times, even though I grew up with it around me, it was the first time I remember trying to think what it would have been like if I had been one of those people. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 1) Name: Moshe and Shimon Rosenberg

Speaker 3: (Move to right chair and sit down.) As I see the film, read the displays, hear the guide tell stories of survivors, look at the photographic images, and the walk around the site itself, I find myself imagining me, who I am now, in their place no matter if I see pictures of prisoners, guards, sonomcomandos, capo, child, man or woman. I keep wondering what I would have done, how I would have managed, and what I might have felt. It is a constant struggle between the inner and outer experience of where I am in reality and what I am imagining. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 3) Name: 17 members of Lien de Jong’s family, especially her father, Charles de Jong and her mother, Catharine Spiero (sit, narrator lights candle)
Speaker 1:

When I see the gates of Birkenau in the distance, I am struck by the size of the camp; it's staggering. As I enter, I see that the camp covers over 400 acres of flat terrain and is basically devoid of trees so that you can see the whole camp from the tower gates—although binoculars would be needed to see the gas chambers at the west end. It's November now, so there's nothing to stop the unforgiving winds that blow across the camp. I imagine how hot it is in the summer with no shade from any trees. The first buildings, which are still standing, were built without foundations on very wet ground that was actually a marsh. The quiet here is disarming, the stillness of many deaths hang heavily in this place. I don't know how to describe it really. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 1) Name: Wolfe Hamo and extended family from Lodz (sit, narrator lights candle)

Shadow:

(Ahenakew)

- You know, how do you get rid of a disease like that, that's going to take over, that's going to dominate, that's going to everything.

Speaker 2:

It is hard to imagine the fullness of this place with people. Did you know that during World War II, there were 44 railroad tracks in the train yard at Auschwitz, more than twice as many as at New York's Penn station? I understand that Auschwitz was a transit center for receiving prisoners from all over Europe and dispatching them to the forced labor sub-camps. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 2) Name: Erich Geiringer, father of Eva Schloss, stepdaughter of Otto Frank (sit, narrator lights candle)

Speaker 3:

I always feel really hopeless here. I'm very very sad because I imagine the thousands of people who would have gone through here. Each time I walk down the tracks to the selection site, I am imagining the crowds there, people who have traveled for many hours, having no sleep, crying, confused, afraid. It is a formidable image. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 3) Name: Dorothea Elisabeth Katzenstein (sit, Narrator lights candle)
Speaker 1: Yes, being at this camp, I am becoming clearer and clearer about what exactly happened. We are talking about real people. Obviously, before I got to this place, I was taught about it and thought about it as a historical truth, a catastrophe, but it was just abstract history. Being here and reading people's personal stories and seeing their photographs, their toothbrushes, and their hair makes it very real. I think that the major change for me is taking it in at a very personal level, getting it really clear that these were really people we're talking about here. When you talk about 6 million Jews being killed, who can take that statistic in? (stand, speakers look at Speaker 1) Name: Devorah Leah (sit, Narrator lights candle)

Shadow: ● You people are exaggerating--6,000,000 Jews weren't killed. What about all the others who were killed? How come you people never talk about them?

Speaker 2: The only trees on the site are the birch trees at the west end of the camp. I am here on the northwest corner where there is a small grove of birch trees. ● I see a permanent sign that has pictures of the women and children in these very same Birch trees. These images are really powerful. The people are sitting in the birch trees after they have gotten off the train, been stripped of their belongings, having walked across the full length of the camp to wait for their turn to go into the gas chambers. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 2) Name: Joseph Perlmuter (sit, Narrator lights candle)
Yes, I saw those photographs, too. I want to tell you a story that really touched me. At the selection site, when a mother was separated from her eldest son—he went to the left and she and her younger children were told to go to the right. Not knowing that she was going straight to the gas chambers, she called after him “Don’t eat the fresh bread!” because he had some stomach problems and she was reminding him to take care of himself. That was a very poignant story in the sense that the people just had no idea about what was going or happen to them. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 1) **Name: Lena and Otto Albersheim from Lengerish** (sit, Narrator lights candle)

The birch trees are very very important to me because they are really tied to the images of the stories that I’ve read of people escaping and running into the trees. I notice that having been in the camps for a few days, I have a strong feeling of something that is Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is like a smell that evokes a memory, Auschwitz also has a smell in the form of a feeling—a dark shadow, an evil sense that has started to get inside of me. How will I get it out of me? (stand, speakers look at Speaker 3) **Name: Tietz family** (sit, Narrator lights candle)

Yes, I am getting that feeling, too. It is very cold today. • I hate being cold, so the stories of the cruelty around the cold—pulling people outside naked and hosing them down, making them stay there all night. That created such an image for me; it’s a very hard image for me to get out of my head; it stays with me. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 2) **Name: Zuskin family** (sit, Narrator lights candle)

Everything that the Nazis and guards would have done here, everything must have been in full view of everyone around. What I keep thinking about when I’m here is imagining how close together every single horror was, every single trauma, and what that must have been like. Packed into everyday, every single horror in concurrent layers. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 1) **Name: Moshe Dermer and Michael Shrentzel from Bukarina** (sit, Narrator lights candle)
Speaker 2: (talk quickly throughout, build the tension) I was observing all the photographs in the displays and thinking “I don’t know how many more corpses and skeletons I can bare to look at.” I get really tired of looking at Jewish corpses and skeletons and just welcome some of the photographs of the resisters. I guess I relate to the skeleton figures somehow. My frame is very skeletal so I wonder if when I look at the skeleton, if I don’t see myself in them. I think at some level, at some level that I can’t articulate, that I do. I think it creates a numbness in me; I have become sort of numb when I see these corpses and skeletons. They are often peering out at me from the photographs.

When I see the piles of corpses, I have difficulty imagining that they were once live humans. When I see the skeletons, the ones that are still alive, I am surprised that they are still alive in that form. My God, they are still living with those stick-like limbs. Oh, just the whole unfairness of life, unfairness of it all. I find that really hard to handle, it almost makes me want to give up, it is too intense. I can’t deal with it. (stand, speakers look at Speaker 2) Name: Pearl Spiegel and Yaakov Dermer from Bukarina (sit, Narrator lights candle)

Shadow: The Jews did a Holocaust of their own when they killed the first-born son of every family in biblical time. They deserved to suffer, too!

Speaker 1: I think about the hardness of life in these camps and in the ghettos and what these thousands and thousands of people went through. Now I can see it in these poor bodies that have been stripped down—all the fat on their bodies, the good parts of life that fill us up and fill us out—gone. Name: Hedwig Ury-Ulm (Narrator lights candle)
**Speaker 3:** How do you cope with it? Well, because I was a firsthand witness in Africa, I say to myself—“I’ve seen this kind of stuff before--people with rotting legs from leprosy. I can handle this; I can stand it.” I try to stay with it, not shy away or ignore it. I want to be a worthy vicarious witness of this horror. **Name:** Elishbeth Fekete (Feldmar) from Budapest (*Narrator lights candle*)

**Speaker 2:** It is similar for me. The script in my head is, “Well I’ve seen this before. I’ve seen it so often now, I can handle it. Its old hat for me--I am a seasoned concentration camp observer.” That’s the script that goes on in my mind when the images get too intense for me. It acts as a buffer. It is also helpful to attend this retreat with people that I know, but I struggle because I can’t really get away from those images. They stick in my mind like Velcro. **Name:** Max and Amalia Loewenberger, Edita and Karel Berger (*Narrator lights candle*)

**Speaker 1:** (stand and walk behind chair) I notice that I have been overeating; eating ten times as much as I normally do and stuff that I usually avoid, like bread and butter. I found that I liked writing about food in my journal--there’s lots of stuff about the food. It is a comfort to me here and I need comfort.

**Speaker 3:** (stand and walk behind chairs to join Speaker 1--face him) I also noticed that after a few days of being at Auschwitz, another member and I are making a bedtime ritual of eating chocolate. It is a very comforting experience to know that the chocolate is both in my pocket and in the room at the end of the day. As a group, I see us sharing chocolate and that special Polish vodka with the fragrant wild grass in it. I think it is a communal self-soothing activity.

**Speaker 2:** (stand and walk behind chairs to join group--move to the center position between Speaker 1 and Speaker 3) I notice that I am depending more on specific group members. I find it helpful to speak to two of them in particular.
Speaker 1:
I am somewhat surprised at what is happening for me in the group—the whole struggle with being on the inside or the outside. I’m surprised at how powerful it is on so many levels. There are the introverts and the extroverts, old friends and new friends, Jews the non-Jews, Christians and non-Christians, people from the centre of dialogue and people from the Youth Hostel, emotional people and non-emotional people, and Canadians and everyone else. There are so many layers of interaction going on, it blows me away. I believe our minds always think in terms of—if I’m this, I’m not that; if its this way then its not that way; this always seems like the first fall back position of the thinking process. At times, it has created a distance from the experience for me; it takes me away from what I am here for. Yet, it is all about the separation that created this holocaust in the first place.

Speaker 2:
Yes, I am glad that you said that because when I was at the selection site in Birkenau yesterday, the Bearing Witness group was dividing up into small groups to have the different religious services, I didn’t know where to go; I felt lost and out of place. I don’t connect to the religious rituals. The concept of God seems absurd to me here, I do not have a God inside me.

Speaker 3:
Yes, when we did the spiritual ritual at the execution wall. I felt like I was a guest at the Kaddish, a guest at the Zen Buddhist ritual, and I couldn’t relate to the Catholic ceremony. I sort of found myself being a bit of a bystander on the outside, even though I was a part of the large group. I also found that I got quite self-conscious at one point, even lighting the memorial candle and putting it down near the wall. Maybe I was more full of having been in the barracks and not fully witnessing the religious rituals going on there. I found that I was looking around and seeing what others were doing so that I didn’t look too out of synch, but I really wasn’t part of it.
Speaker

I suppose this sense of isolation and separateness was most highlighted last night in our large Bearing Witness evening. As you recall, there was a long discussion about whether it would be acceptable to the larger group if a small group of participants read the names of the Nazi perpetrators on the Birkenau site this morning. The discussion was very heated, confusing, and hurtful. We heard anti-Semitic comments, separation between newcomers and returning participants, and isolation of the German participants.

Shadow: ● You can’t really say anything critical to a Jewish person without them bringing up their suffering in Holocaust. It gets really irritating.

Speaker

I suppose being a vicarious witness, I cannot be separated from the others I am with, but I think it is important not to be owned by the group’s position either.

Speaker

I think we Canadians, all emotionally left the group last night. I think that is what made our own rituals so powerful today; we were a united front against racism. We started this morning when some of our members read the names at the selection site and included the ages of the murdered so that we had a sense of the people living a life. Then we honoured those murdered relatives of our friends and acquaintance in Vancouver by reading their names and lighting candles for them in the children’s barracks. We also threw a blessing/healing stone from a Haida Gwai elder into the pond where the Nazis put the ashes of those they murdered. It was a powerful day of standing against genocide.
I think, too, that ending the retreat by going to see Marian and his paintings was also a very good thing. Especially going to the monastery in the middle of the night with no lights out in the country and down into a dark basement—it was like a mythical journey. The walls were absolutely covered from top to bottom with these paintings of his understanding of the faces of concentration camp victims; it was amazing. Marian, now in his 80s, had been in the camp at 17 years old. The paintings and his beautiful wife were actually an affirmation of his life. He didn’t talk about the camps or the holocaust for over 50 years. Then he had a stroke and in order to heal himself, he started painting. He has hundreds of these huge paintings. Someone in the group asked, “Did it help to heal you?” and he said yes and no. Yes, it got him through that period after his stroke and revitalized him. But no, it didn’t help him with the holocaust at all. In fact, he said it made him worse because everything that he had successfully repressed his whole adult life then came up in his face.

Yes, but I have to say that I can hardly wait to go home, now. I am saturated. I don’t think that I have ever wanted to leave somewhere so badly as this last day at Auschwitz.

(All speakers sit in chairs facing away from the slide screen towards the candles.) Now that we are on the train-ride out of Krakow and I lay here alone with my thoughts, I think it is harder than when I came into this city. I am not so naïve; I am filled with the horrors of the concentrations camps, the stories that I heard, and this awful feeling of Auschwitz that it left inside of me. I think that I have found something to stand for and I understand racism as no other place could teach me.
Patrice: (enter from the side and stand at center stage/ all speakers turn on seat to face audience) In this pond in Birkenau, the Nazis discarded the ashes of over one million people. (pause) Although we left Europe behind us, we all carried the memories of our visit very close to our hearts. We spent time together, trying to make sense of our experiences, noting changes in our feelings and thoughts, as well as the strong desire to take action together in our communities. All of us returned home with a new perspective on our lives and the lives of others. (step back to candle area)

Speaker 1: I remember when I was very ill a number of years ago. One of the ways that I acted out my stress and anxiety was to watch war movies over and over and over again, especially 2nd WW movies because I knew how it ended—there was no anxiety about who won. I intuitively know there is a connection between the war movies and going to witness the camps. I think it’s about a sense that all death has meaning. When I don’t allow myself to mourn the death of someone, I believe that I falsely protect myself from hopelessness and grief.

Speaker 3: I agree with the idea of a resistance to mourn. It is almost a week since I came home and I still feel out of sorts and at times, it is really difficult to find myself in my everyday life. Every night I dream about being in the camp with all the horror that I learned about there. I find myself thinking about it constantly, and seeing reminders of it everywhere I look. I do believe that I am in grief about what took place for all of humanity in this catastrophe of hate.

Speaker 2: When I think about the experience that we had together in visiting these concentration camps I wonder if what the Peacemaker community is doing will have an impact worldwide? Was our witnessing just a personal experience, or will our telling about it have an impact somehow? I wonder what the best strategy is to try and promote peace. Is going to these sites and bearing witness—is that a good strategy or not? I don’t know.
Well, one of the surprises for me was how much I actually liked being in Germany and Poland. I remember saying before I went that I would probably hate being in Germany, and hate hearing German and Polish spoken. What stands out for me is a strong sense of gratitude at being very open with Germans and Poles, two nationalities that I had been raised to HATE. This feels very healing to me.

Yes, I agree because I found that I really appreciated being with German and Polish participants because I really believe in the possibility of reconciliation. I think that the more we can spend time together, the more the healing can take place. In that regard, I really do believe in integration.

I have to say that on this trip I made a contract with myself that I was going to do it fully--openly witnessing the evidence of what happened there and meeting descendants of those who perpetrated it. To my astonishment, it wasn’t as traumatizing as I thought it would to be. It was more like that story that Ram Dass tells about those mediating monks who were sitting in the mediation posture but falling off to sleep. The head monk comes behind them with a big stick and beats them about the shoulders to wake them up. That's how I felt about it; it was a real wake-up call about the importance of standing up on the side of humanity, equality, and peace.

I suppose that this heavy weight around me is about being at Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau. I think it is a wake-up call about bearing the heaviness of witnessing by seeing the evidence of brutality and trying to make connections to create reconciliation among those with differences before it gets out of hand.

The retreat brought Jews, Germans, and Poles to one place to eat, sleep, and perform rituals together. But what the retreat failed to do in my mind was to go a step further by acknowledging how pervasive racism is and take action against it. What we were looking at is the results of racism and I want to do something now.
Being in the camps and struggling with my place as a non-Jewish mourner in the face of the holocaust, I find myself seeing others differently—more as people, as individuals rather than stereotypes such as Germans, Jews, and Poles. Although millions of people were murdered, I saw evidence of individuals suffering, sometimes surviving against all odds. This has taken away my usual way of seeing people as generalized in a single grouping and brought me to the specifics of individuals struggling in the context of unspeakable oppression. I want to create relationship out of being with people in the moment, rather than out of my own absorbed prejudice.

(lean forward on the edge of the chair with elbows on thighs) I see this trip to the camps as being a natural antidepressant as well as an anti-oppressant. It really levels the playing field and makes me realize how very grateful I am for my life, for participating in life, for having life. I see hope, potential, and possibility in the young people around me. I have even given up conflict with my neighbors. It just isn’t worth putting energy into something that is so trivial after what I saw evidence of in the camps.

(lean forward on the edge of the chair with elbows on thighs) I’m quite clear that bearing witness, is about being responsible, carrying a responsibility. Now that I’ve been in that place, seen those things, and taken the position where I have born witness to the evidence, I can’t just go about business as usual. I cannot and will not be complacent in the face of oppression again.

(lean forward on the edge of the chair with elbows on thighs) I have this expectation that I will be able to somehow explain or express what I see in a way that others can hear. It seems to me that it would be selfish to go and not be able to share it in some way. You know what we saw there is really about all of humanity—about each one of us.
Shadow: • Who gives a damn about the Jews, eh?
• Yeah, and the damn blacks...and all those Asians
• ...and what about all of those homeless bums, hookers
  and addicts on the downtown Eastside
• ...and all the faggots and dykes. They're always
  whining about their rights.
• ...and the cripples...and the bloody seniors
• Who gives a damn about the lot of them anyways?
Speaker 3: (Close book and stands up squarely) I do! I'm never going to forget the images of the concentration camps.

Speaker 2: (Close book and stands up squarely) I do! I went to a concentration camp and witnessed the inhumanity of racism and murder.

Speaker 1: (Close book and stands up squarely) I do! I ended up going to the concentration camps and forgetting to remember the hate with which I was raised.

Patrice: (Joins group standing beside Speaker 2) The concentration camp sites document the deepest and worst violation of humanity, right where the crime took place. Our experience of vicariously witnessing the horror of the camps has enforced and advocated for us the universal meaning of human rights. At no other place is the message about the value of freedom and dignity more powerful than on the edge of an abyss.

Audience members are invited to light a candle and set it on the stage to remember anyone who died as a result of oppression.
CHAPTER SIX
Aspects of Interest in Vicarious Witnessing

From this retrospective vantage point, I look back to the beginning of my study where I asked a central question—How do individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma through narrative, visual, and evidence-based representations of traumatic events in a public setting such as the concentration camps of Europe? In the narrative process of coming to know and understand, I am now aware of many aspects of the vicarious witnessing as experienced by the participants in this study. In the following sections, I present the details of my understanding of this remarkable witnessing process.

How Vicarious Witnesses Make Sense

I had a unique opportunity to move through this project being closely and intimately linked with the other witnessing participants. We planned, traveled, witnessed, cried, prayed, returned, and testified together. Through our joint interest in bearing witness to the concentration camps, we evolved in the experience together. In a sense, we constructed a vicarious witnessing culture that had its own language, activities, rituals, sense of humour, and constraints. We were embodied in the experience as a group. My fellow witnesses helped me to interpret and understand what I experienced as I perceived and interacted with the being of the camps. This reminds me of two assumptions that I put forth in the beginning of my study as suggested by Gergen (1999)—the meaning of language is constructed through relationship and as we represent our experience in language, we construct our future because language is the crucial element of action. Through languaging our experience in the culture of vicarious witnessing we made meaning of our experiences.

Experience, Perception, and the Imagination

Experiential perceptions are given significance through languaging the experience; we tell stories to make sense. In this section, I take one step back to look specifically at experience itself; the process of perceptions that we language about. This is an important aspect for the vicarious witnessing experience, as it is through perception that the experience begins.

According to Thompson (2001), our perception is embedded in, constrained by, and contributed to the enactment of the surrounding world. People both imitate and are shaped by the environment; person and environment are bound together in reciprocal conditions and boundaries. This parallels the ideas of Dooling (1989) when he spoke about perceptions involved in witnessing as affecting both the event observed and the witnesses themselves; there is no objective or disconnected seeing. It is through the actions of my perception that I see, and
in turn, I affect what I see. Thought and language depend on this embodied capacity for action as the sensing body responds to and interprets lived perceptions and experience.

I am particularly interested in Thompson’s report on the evidence of mirror neurons in human beings. He explains that mirror neurons appear to “form a cortical system that matches the observation and the performance of motor actions” (p.9) or gestures of others. This means that we have a system for recognizing the intentional meaning of the actions of another person; a direct matching of the body of self to other. Through this neuronal system, the movements and gestures of an other are already understood as goal-directed actions because they match with a self-performed action. Being able to mirror an other in the self becomes particularly important for understanding and meaning to arise from bodily and social experience.

Thompson also states that meaning arises from our innate capacity to imagine from bodily and interactional experience into the abstract. Perception and imagination are closely linked processes. This is particularly important in the practice of vicarious witnessing; everyone told many stories about putting themselves in another person’s shoes.

*The Vicarious Witnessing Imagination*

What is it to imagine being an other? To understand this, I go back to Thompson who describes the process of empathy, which corresponds closely with the process of vicarious witnessing. In general, empathy is the experience of “feeling lead by an experience that is not one’s own” (Stein, cited in Thompson, 2001, p. 16). Witnesses expressed this experience, “The victims are with me here; they have re-emerged;” and, “Each day when I walk to the Birkenau selection site, I fill the space with crowds of exhausted people arriving on the trains. I think of the sounds there would have been, crying, maybe even the sound of gunshots;” and, “I pick up a sense of people waiting—waiting to be free, to eat, for relief, for punishment, for death.”

When the other appears “all at once” in the imagination, witnesses can transpose themselves to the place of the other so that they can understand the other’s experience, from the other’s point of view. Thompson describes different ways in which a person perceives the other as an embodied subject. For vicarious witnessing, three of these processes are important—animating the other through the witness’s own “field of sensations” (p. 17), animating the other by the witness’s own general feelings of life or being in a living body, and animating the other through the witness’s expression of their own subjective experience. In terms of the witness’s field of sensations, one witness explains, “My imagination had a personal quality to it, it was connected to my own life. I found that the most profound experiences were the ones that were the most personal. When I went into the gas chamber in Auschwitz, I remembered the acrid
smell of gas in my chemistry class as a child. It made the reality of the gas chamber alarming.” A different witness goes on to say, “I struggled with the stories around being cold. It was so cold on the site that those stories were very poignant to me.” In her sense of life, one witness described herself imagining how it was for different people in the camps including both prisoners and guards, “exploring how I might act, how I might respond, what extent I would go to, how I might have resisted or not. I experienced the feeling of one survivor who said ‘terror is the best of guards.’ I started to doubt myself and wondered if I might have done horrible things to live, or if I would have given up.” Another witness described making “small films” and “still images” in her mind. She talked about how the fragments of witnessed evidence enforced and filled out the inner images. For example, she described “seeing people in my mind’s eye in the bathrooms, imagining the SS drowning prisoners in the toilets, imagining me in the rush and how I might fight or get by.” In terms of her own subjective experience, another witness told a story of a young pregnant women who was sent to the camps. This young woman managed to hide her pregnancy and was sent to work for 10 to 12 hours a day as a laborer. Her baby was born in the barracks and only survived four or five days. She was so hungry and desperate that she ate her own baby. The vicarious witness explains, “At first there is an image of the woman, dressed in prison clothes in the cold with the dead baby. I skipped to her with flesh in her mouth and then I placed myself in her shoes with the baby who is one of my own children as an infant. I imagined myself struggling with what to do, thinking that my body created the baby and so I want to put the baby back in me. I know my children would want me to do that.” In this case, the witness formed a single body from her and the other. They shared a common intrasubjective space.

The final piece Thompson (2001) describes is after the person has seen an experience from the perspective of the other. At this time, the person becomes clear about the other’s experience. Clarity came on many levels for the vicarious witnesses. For example, they described aspects of the crisis in witnessing as outlined by Felman and Laub (1992), where survivors had difficulty telling about their experiences because it was too much to tell. One witness spoke clearly about this aspect, “As I was preparing to go, reading, watching films, talking to people, the story became bigger and bigger. When people would ask me about my trip, it became more difficult to talk about because I couldn’t convey the meaning of why it was so important to go. Without telling everything, it seemed so pointless so I gave up telling.” Further, the witness suffers with the other because the story is so difficult. This aspect is clearly seen in the sculpture I created upon my return from the camps (see Figure 3). Vicarious
witnesses also experienced a similar form of dissonance as survivors described when meeting the unknown or unexpected during the Holocaust period. From the evidence situated in the camps and associated museums, one witness writes, “Then we went into the Jewish Museum in Berlin... We could not stand the emptiness. We hated it... at the time we only responded to the emptiness, the loss, the entire catastrophe. It was only later before we could allow ourselves to feel the pain.” Another witness speaks about not knowing how to respond, “So one flows with it wandering, lost, trying to make sense, and reaching for whatever seems normal.” In responding to seeing the personal effects of prisoners (e.g., hair, clothes, glasses, shoes), a witness states that she was “so shocked that it was difficult to think, make an opinion, be objective, or see critically. I just had no time to digest and think about the overwhelming amount of images and information that bombarded me.”

Other aspects of the imagination in the vicarious witnessing experience arose related to a struggle with interfacing the experience of perception with the experience of imagination. The first aspect of this related to the actual experience of focusing on thoughts and imagination at the same time as attending to seeing, hearing, or experiencing, “When I look out and focus on what I am seeing, the inner picture that I am imagining disappears. It seems like they have their own way of ebbing and flowing, like I am moving constantly between the two and it becomes one experience.” This aspect became prominent when witnesses saw evidence and heard stories of acts of violence. Being present at the site of the crime, allowed them to fill in the gaps of the stories with actual structures from the camp itself making the inner images “clearer,” “more vivid,” and “more detailed.” In addition, witnesses found that artistic representations of the atrocity were as impactful, if not more in some cases, to charge the event vicariously witnessed with emotion. “It is odd,” one witness explains, “because I know that I am safe on the outside, but my imagination makes this place an extremely terrifying place to be. It’s hard to reconcile.” Finally, witnesses experienced limits to their imagination, as it seems that imagination is bound by what is currently known. The more that one knew or observed as evidence, the more able witnesses were to imagine the experience of the other. At times, witnesses expressed despair in trying to make sense of the story of the camps, repeating often and among each other, “I can’t imagine,” “it is unbelievable,” and “how can this be possible?”

In remarkable ways, putting oneself in the shoes of an other in such an intense and evocative way, allowed witnesses to understand themselves as an other. “I had to know how bad it could get. Knowing that gave me something with which to contrast the darkness in myself. Now I know I could never be that dark. I was able to realize and come to terms with the
darkness in everybody.” A different witness describes a similar experience of contrasts, “Going to the concentration camps was a natural anti-depressant. The loudness of that horror far outweighs the quiet irritants in my own mind. It puts daily struggles in perspective.” In a different way, another witness “realized that in fact I am able to do very very hard stuff and that I’m not superwoman. I need rest and that’s fine. I really got the whole thing in perspective.” Another witness came to a sense of peace with Judaism and felt like that provided her with some resolution with one of her parents. She also had some “sense of hope for fighting against racism.” For me, I lost my naivety about human evil and understood racism as no other experience could teach me. I also found my own limits related to survival, recognizing for the first time that it could be possible for me to give up the fight to live in conditions that extreme.

The Witnessing After-Image

During the “Loon Lake Conference” (see chapter two) I gave a thought paper that included the idea of the witnessing after-image. Although I did not ask participants directly about the after-image experience, some mentioned the experience during the final interview and in journal entries. For example, participants alluded to the after-image experience when they said, “I can feel this sense of Auschwitz; it’s gotten inside of me,” and “when I am doing normal things, that sense and thought of the camps hangs on me.” When we returned one participant said, “I have this heavy weight around me, this heavy weight, I feel like I am still over there.” A different witness commented that she felt “a sense of the camp in my dreams and a strong influence of it in my daily life. It’s not frightening, just perplexing. I keep wondering, why I am still there.” Personally, I too had a strong experience of the after-image in the first two months after my return. I noticed that the sense of the camp intruded into my thoughts. Seeing and experiencing small reminders (e.g., granite stones, metal grates, faces of people) triggered thoughts and feelings as I went through my daily life. It felt like I was carrying the experience physically; it seemed to radiate out slightly from my skin. This is consistent with another witness who said, “I feel the experience surrounding me; it’s hard to shake.” Witnesses also noticed dreams that carried that same sense of the after-image upon waking, the memory of which intruded into daily life like a physical substance.

Meaning Making and Narrative Instances

Knowing that imagination emerges from embodied perceptual experience and storying the experience constructs meaning and understanding, I entered into each participant’s process of making meaning as near to their experience as I could come as they described it in a single moment in time. All witnesses had their own unique way of coming to know through the
storytelling process, which I reflected in the form of the story presented for each. Their different perspectives reflect their particular positioning as offered to me in written, spoken, and visual form. The three different stories reflected each other; what arose in one, arose in another. They each confirmed an essential message that they were trying to convey to me.

Sima tells her spoken, written, and visual story from the perspective of social action and her desire to fight for equality, specifically for anti-racism. It is only in the written text where she reflects often about her more personal social struggle of “not measuring up” in the context of the witnessing group. When we talked about this aspect, she remarked that she experienced frequent rejection and ridicule as a child for being Jewish, so her sense of racism is skin deep and her perspective, a life perspective.

Karen constructs her experience through contrasts both in her spoken and written stories. She is able to see one side and then the other. Her life work puts her face to face with people’s struggle to survive. She ends her story by coming to a sense of balance, not falling into one extreme or another; she called it “peace.” Her experience in the camps evened things out and calmed the anxiety that pushed her back and forth on life’s oscillating pendulum.

Anne presented two distinct voices in her written and spoken stories. As an immigrant she seemed to have one foot in her old home where her family still resides and the other here where she lives with her own husband and children. She lives in the context of her parent’s family through particular nuances in their common language; a distinct difference is heard. This experience of two voices is compounded by her conversion to Judaism, occasionally experiencing oppression and insults from within her new community. Her story reflects her struggle to have a voice and a place where she can be accepted in the whole of herself in a supportive cultural group. This is reflected in her visual story when she talks about two photographs of importance, each carrying a sense of mutuality, belonging, and warmth among people.

Finally, Kathleen carries a unique perspective in the fluidity of poetics in her spoken, and especially her written stories. In her visual story she told me that she pointed her camera with a certain intention, trying to capture the feeling of what was important and meaningful to her. She took an amazing photograph of the pond in Birkenau where the Nazis discarded the ashes of the murdered. In the photograph, the plants at the edge of the water were clearly visible, but the pond was black. In her metaphorical sense, she spoke about her own life struggle to step outside of the darkness to see the beauty and hope in the light.
Studying the meaning of storied human experience is constrained by the perpetually shifting changes in the words that convey the essence as the stories are told and re-told in the community of others; meaning can never be nailed down in an exact or permanent form. At best, I can only glimpse a reflection or indication of meaning in a momentary sense as I hold the stories told at one moment and retold differently in another. Indeed, as Polkinghorne (1988) explains, meaning is continually reconstituted in the context of life's perpetually shifting experiences. Further, we only have direct access to our own realm of meaning. We construct meaning through the processes of self-reflection, recall, and introspection. This limits my ability to understand the meanings that others present and represent to me. In this study, I attempted to open up the possibilities for grasping the narrative truth of participant's experiences by offering them three different ways to express their experience (i.e., spoken, written, and visual stories). Still, I could only receive partial, situational, and historical messages. Because the nature of language is context related, particular circumstances can alter what a person says, enacts, or otherwise creates. Indeed, meaning may be lost when it is isolated outside of the context where it began. Additionally, language is imprecise and cannot produce conclusions about the shifting nature of storying lived experience. Narrative meaning is an integrated collection of relationships among ideas and images, perception, remembrances, and imagination, only allowing me the possibility of offering instances of experience.

In this section I look at three narrative instances that reflect the experience of vicariously witnessing trauma; a narrative instance between parts of the visual text of one witness (single-text), a narrative instance between the visual and written texts that were parts of a collection of stories for one witness (intratextual), and a narrative instance between the spoken texts of all witnesses who are part of a shared story (intertextual). As a reflection of the form with which witnesses shared their original stories, I present these narrative instances in written, visual, and spoken texts. As a reminder, no narrative text represents the other, and each analysis of a narrative instance is matched specifically to each participant and I believe, is uniquely adequate for the experience of vicarious witnessing.

Metaphors of Meaning: A Single-Text Narrative Instance

In this single-text narrative instance, I interpret the meanings that emerge between two parts (i.e., self of the narrator and the focus of attention) of one participant’s story (Kathleen) from a single text (visual). I present this narrative instance through the description of a series of six photographs taken by the participant. Here, the meaning of the witness’s experience is
woven into various metaphors constructed by her through her visual text to represent her focus of attention, which reflects her as the subject of the narrative.

*The war memorial in Berlin.* Kathleen takes a close-up shot of an iron sculpture of a woman who is amongst a group of other women and children on the walk of exile from the camps in search of home (see Figure 5). She describes her as one of the older women, having a seemingly quasi-blank look on her face, yet appearing strained and used. She notices the life lines, the worn expression on her face, the hard iron tendons, and the smallness of the woman's structure. She also notes how the woman appears upright with her head held high. In many ways, this one image physically and emotionally reflects the witness herself. Kathleen, along with difficult events in her family, also experienced the ravages and trauma of wars in Africa and Asia as a helping professional. She describes herself as standing tall, nurturing hope in the possibility of repair despite the hardships she has experienced. The woman in the sculpture becomes a model of herself; the iron protecting and holding up a strong inner spirit, a heart, that cannot be touched or shaken by the hardships of life. The iron tendons and skeletal form represents the foundation of solidity and strength on which she stands; it is on this foundation that life is built. She noted that the woman showed the absence of fat, a reflection of the “good parts of life that fill us up and fill us out.” At this point in time, Kathleen recognizes her opportunity to use her privileged position to do good in the world by stepping out of her comfort zone and making a difference in her community.

The final aspect of this photographed sculpture is the fact that she focused on one woman amidst a group. Through the experience of visiting the camps, group aspects were an important focus of attention for Kathleen. She noted aspects of inclusion, control, and trust within the group as being both necessary and encumbering to her experience of witnessing in the camps. At times, when she felt disconnected from members of the group, or out of place due to religious aspects of the performed rituals, she noted that she was distracted from witnessing fully. Concerns about the group created a distance from the experience because she worried about her own actions and interactions that might be judged negatively by others and prevent her from being included. She said at these times, it was “more a looking in than a looking out” and “to really bear witness it seems that I have to be really in the moment” not worried about other things because “I can’t trust what I’m seeing...worrying that I might not be seeing it the *right* way.” To Kathleen, being a good enough witness means knowing the truth as close as possible, trusting what she sees, and speaking about it without doubting herself, her thoughts, or her voice so that others will be able to receive it as clearly as possible.
Grass growing up through the stones of Treblinka. Kathleen says that the most important aspect of her journey to the concentration camps “was standing amongst the rocks of Treblinka.” The multitude of stones in the Treblinka memorial was overwhelming for her, as they represented the number of people murdered in a single day. In the midst of the sorrow of this staggering symbol of lives lost, she was struck by some tall shoots of grass pushing up through the stones (see Figure 6). She explained, “I crouched down, I wanted to see the sun come in... I just wanted to see that life was still pushing up in between those stones.” In the photograph, the grass is the lightest part of the image, almost as if a spotlight was pointed directly at the grassy stalks. The centre of the photograph is a stone with the grass slightly off centre to the right. This reflects Kathleen’s situation exactly, as her focus of attention was primarily on the stones with the grass as a welcome distraction amidst the mourning.

Figure 5: Sculpture of a woman in a holocaust memorial in Berlin, Germany.
There are a number of contrasts that I note in the photograph—the hardness and permanence of the stones and the fragile and ephemeral life of the plant; from the backdrop of a shadowy forest and shaded stones, there is a direct cast of light on the plant; and I see life growing despite the impossible pressure and heaviness of the stones. For Kathleen, this aspect of life struggling amidst the seemingly impossible reflects her own experience of having withstood and survived very difficult events, and through them having received great strength from which to grow. She describes occasions in her life where she had been "frozen in grief and depression" and in that state wanting to keep hold of the grief rather than allowing it to ebb and flow as grief does. Holding it immobilized her and left her feeling angry, self preoccupied, and defeated. She talks about her sense of compassion for herself and others as being "rendered like a stone" inside of her. She intuitively knew that going to the camps would be "the touchstone," the action to return her to seeing again, cracking the stone enough to let the light through as with the grass in the stones of Treblinka.

*Candle on stone at Treblinka.* The third photograph is a close-up view of a small metal memorial candle on top of one of the stones in the Treblinka memorial (see Figure 7). The tall
rectangular stone is in the centre of the image with the candle situated in the upper half of the frame. She describes being touched by this candle because it "looks like it is teetering. Although it is rusty and old, it can hold a light in it. There is something about that kind of rusty metal standing crookedly on top of a rock that I find very touching--that single star standing out. Although there was no name on the stone, there was something about that candle that just seemed so much like a human life. Like here is a candle put on the top of a stone which the wind may or may not blow over. Perhaps someone came by and just picked it up off the ground and placed it there. There's something kind of so solid and precarious about that I really like, a beat up candle all by itself. It is a very grand memorial which I think is so impactful. It is such a tragedy that the individuals can't be remembered and somehow that little teetering can signifies the memory of a single life." For Kathleen, another focus of attention at this site was the sheer number of people that were represented in the memorial; she struggled with how to fathom the hundreds of thousands whose ashes lay beneath her feet. In order to grasp the multitudes, she focused on the few as representatives. The candle became a human life, an individual, a body, a person that was memorialized by her in the photograph and by one or many others who may have set the candle on the stone. She sought to find the personal amidst
the anonymity of the many. Again, the image of a life emerging amidst the death comes this
time, in the form of a human life remembered and represented by a rusty candle. The candle
stands for a life that may have been similar to her own.

**Barbed wire in sculpture.** Kathleen was particularly struck by the image of the barbed
wire inside the sculpture of a ruined prisoner (see Figures 8 and 9). I present here two different
perspectives of the same sculpture. The first (Figure 8) perspective shows a direct view of the
sculpture itself. The human figure has been torn apart to form the swastika symbol of the Nazis.
In this direct view, Kathleen captures a representation of the experience of prisoner life in the
Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. She understands the meaning of this figure as similar to and
standing for the indescribable disdain for human life perpetrated by the Nazis within the camps.
Of interest to her was the idea of how people, who survived, held themselves together and
continued on with life. She takes a close up view from behind the sculptured figure to capture
the barbed wire inside of the figure (see Figure 9). She wonders, “If you think about the people
who might have survived, what might have to happen to you inside in order to be able to hold
yourself together?” In this statement, she ponders the situation of an other from her own frame
of reference. Particularly significant is the fact that she moved to the back of the figure, rather
than staying with the frontal view. When I think of the “back” there is a sense of something
behind, past, hidden, and out of sight. In the sense of survival from trauma or stressful
hardship, people often tend to keep the events hidden and out of mind in order to move on.
When Kathleen wonders about what holds one together, she points directly to the past trauma
experience as a kind of glue that keeps the pieces together. As described above, she talks about
receiving great strength from her ability to have survived life’s hardships.

During her visit to the camps, Kathleen describes this sense of strength and holding in a
number of instances where she witnessed evidence of people’s reparation from traumatic
experiences. For example, she connected with an older woman during the Retreat who was
hidden with various non-Jewish families during the war. Through this encounter, Kathleen
witnessed the process of repair as this woman faced her family’s murder straight-on through
witnessing the camps, participating in rituals where she honoured and remembered her family
for the first time, and through discussing with other participants her experiences of living
without her family and the consequences for her as a parent. According to Kathleen, her
association with this older woman provided her a model for survival, courage, and aging with
dignity. Witnessing the process of this woman’s experience created a sense of hope and
Figure 8. Sculpture of prisoner in the Auschwitz State Museum.
affirmation of life for Kathleen. She was able to witness how traumatic memories could be encapsulated or separated from the self through a flexible skin that could allow access but not absorption, that could be kept alive but also at bay.

Barbed Wire Bones

Figure 9. Back view of the barbed wire inside sculpture in the Auschwitz State Museum.

Tombstone pieces in the walls of Kazimierz. In a straight-on frontal view of a segment of the long wall around the Kazimierz Jewish cemetery, Kathleen aims to capture an attempt at bringing order to the pieces of shattered tombstones from the site (see Figure 10). She spoke often of the sense of chaos and horror that seemed to permeate the experience of the Jewish
people as they were continuously scattered, separated, and forced to move from place to place causing the destruction of any sense of order or normalcy. As she tries to make sense of the experience, she comments that “I was thinking about how, given the pieces that are left, they just couldn’t put them together in any way that makes sense. All you see are little bits and pieces that don’t belong together. In the cemetery, you get all the tombstones in rows, something that a Jewish cemetery would never have. It is a strong image for me, a reminder of the chaos.”

Tombstone Walls

Figure 10. Tombstone pieces in the wall at the Kazimierz Jewish cemetery

As I look more closely at the photograph of the wall, I see it as a structure of protection that keeps something out (or in). This particular wall seems like a symbol for bringing order to the chaos of which Kathleen speaks. She recognizes the construction of the wall as an example of how people attempt to construct something of sense out of something that is senseless.
Further, the wall is another indication of reparation. In this case, the pieces of a strong culture are pulled forward, placed, and held together; they are built anew into a different way of being than before. For Kathleen, a constant struggle to make sense of the atrocity and murder ensued from the bits and pieces of information she gained during her witnessing experience; any experience of order may have felt like a relief in the disarray of it all. As with us all, in her own life experience, pulling the pieces together after a destructive event gave her renewed strength, structure, and perhaps even protection in the forward movement of growth and development.

*The black pond of Birkenau.* Although Kathleen was disappointed with how this final photograph turned out, it was an amazing metaphor for the crimes she vicariously witnessed in the concentration camps. “I wanted to take a shot of the pond directly into the water because I knew what was in that water.” The photograph is a close-up image of the large pond where the Nazi’s discarded the ashes of more than a million and a half people cremated in the ovens of Birkenau (see Figure 11). In the photograph, the grass and autumn leaves at the bottom of the frame sit in the water at the edge of the pond. They are slightly out of focus, yet in full colour. The water that takes up the remainder of the image, however, is a dense black shadow. In looking at the photograph, Kathleen says, “I think the sun would have been black in Birkenau because of the smoke and ash in the air...[this image] really goes into the darkness.” She sees the reflection of the black sun on the water’s surface.

Once again, I see a contrast within this photograph—a darkness above held and supported by life below, or looking at it in another way, life emerging out of the darkness. Kathleen’s important focus on the tensions between light breaking through the darkness or life emerging from the sorrow of death, brings me to a powerful comment she made about her position as a witness. She wrote about her firsthand experience of seeing what happened to the lives of innocent people when they were driven from their homes and their homeland in Africa and Asia. Despite helping people by binding wounds and listening to their stories, she realized that it was her presence there that had the biggest impact. She was someone from the outside world who could see and believe what happened. Because she had witnessed, she was able to tell others about it and make a difference for those people. Although she believes that this action seemed “like precious little,” she realizes that seeing, admitting to, and trying to imagine the horror, rather than shying away from it, keeps it from happening first inside herself, then between her and those closest to her, and finally between her and the vast world of others. Through vicarious witnessing in the camps she felt that she moved even further into the process
of being able to speak out, as she experienced a strong renewal of her own voice, and her strength to use it.

The Pond of Birkenau

Figure 11. Close-up photograph of the pond in Auschwitz II at Birkenau

Visual Meaning: An Intratextual Narrative Instance

The collage in Figure 12 (see p. 169) represents my visual interpretation of a powerful narrative instance between Sima’s visual and written texts. In the centre of the image sits a photograph taken by Sima at Crematorium IV on the Birkenau site in Poland. From this centre image, I move into her written text and construct visual representations of the narrative instance between her textual symbols. Because I have already interpreted the narrative instance through this collage, I invite the reader to construct their own interpretation by spending some time looking at the different aspects of the collage, comparing the two sides, the top and bottom, the colour, the positioning of the people and so on.
Figure 12. An interpretive collage of an intratextual narrative instance.
In this intertextual narrative instance, I represent our shared experiences of bearing witness in the form of a discussion between members of our witnessing group as we grapple with the meaning of our process. The content of this instance is derived from spoken texts only.

Scene: Imagine the five of us as we sit in a circle of comfortable chairs in a warm, sunny room with a south facing window. Each person embracing and sipping from a ceramic mug which holds warm tea or coffee; some are eating chocolate. Spring is well on its way as evidenced by the blossoming trees and vibrant birdsong just outside the window.

Patrice: Well--here we are, a week after the performance! I am sitting here with a real sense of something very powerful having happened by our efforts to speak out about what we vicariously witnessed and witnessed in the concentration camps. How is everyone else feeling about it? (Kathleen passes a plate with freshly baked cake around the circle, beginning with Sima.)

Sima: (She takes the plate and pauses.) I agree, Patrice. I feel so strongly that it was important for us to bear witness so that the victims of the atrocity did not die for nothing. It is so important to carry on the memory so people know about the brutality and injustice of what happened. (She takes a piece of cake and passes the plate on.)

Anne: (Anne takes some cake off the plate and passes it to Karen.) Yes, that's why I thought that the discussion group after the performance was very important; the audience members had strong reactions. It was good to see how impactful it was to people and how they were processing it. Many good things came of that discussion, like people's conviction to speak out about racist comments and talk to each other about oppression.

Karen: (Karen takes some cake and gives the plate to Patrice.) I was actually really surprised about the strong reaction of the audience. I didn’t experience the performance that same way emotionally, so it was quite unexpected to experience the strong emotional response of people watching it; it kind of overwhelmed me.

Kathleen: (Patrice offers the cake plate to Kathleen, who sets it down on the table.) You were really taken aback by people’s response, Karen (pauses thoughtfully). I know that the Holocaust has been a part of your life for a long time. The first time I came face to face with it was when I saw a film about the Holocaust in my twenties. It evoked a deep feeling of responsibility in me. I expect that people watching our performance must have been touched in a similar way; maybe there were some people who did not know very much about it. We may have been informing people about things they never knew
about before; that is what made it important for me. The performance gave me an opportunity to speak out about oppression. I felt really welcomed in having the non-Jewish voice and I felt like I finally had a place to speak where I couldn't before. So it was very important for me to be a part of it all. It fulfilled one of my reasons for going on the trip—to witness and to tell. In this way, I would say that the performance was as important as the trip itself.

Sima: Yes, I agree. I think that the performance gave me the piece that was missing at the Bearing Witness Retreat. It gave me an opportunity to express my views and feelings through a very artistic medium. It really gave me a sense of purpose, something to work towards, something to live for! It was such a rich presentation and a good strategy to eliminate racism.

Anne: I like what you are both saying about a sense of completion and speaking out. I also feel a very strong responsibility to tell and inform others about what I witnessed. I think people really learn through the personal not the philosophical. I also think that the trip was therapeutic and that was reflected in the performance. I could see the movement of the people psychologically. Our social action work of bearing witness gave us the opportunity to express our opinion and at the same time, educate others. I guess that's part of social action--becoming informed and passing it on.

Kathleen: I think it is the artistic aspect of the performance that gave it that emotional staying power with people.

Sima: Yes, like I said before, it was very rich artistically. I also really enjoyed working together with all of you as a group. I especially appreciated the collaboration because I wasn't left feeling isolated in carrying my experience of being in the concentration camps. Staying connected and working together has really helped me process the experience. In a sense we bear witness together and it makes it more powerful for me both personally and socially.

Anne: Yes, doing the performance was like going through a re-enactment of the experience. It offset the trauma and division, isolation and helplessness because we were able to do something together.

Patrice: I agree, Anne. The social alliance we created and the opportunity to speak out together really did help to counteract the risks from witnessing, imagining, testifying; and the risks to our life, ability to tell our truth, and our self-integrity. We spoke about many risks in bearing witness as each of you discussed with me your experiences, writing, and
photographs. One thing that all but one of us noticed was a sense of being saturated; a specific point where you felt overwhelmed and withdrew from the situation for fear of being absorbed by the horror; you could not take any more in. This is an important feeling to be in touch with because we were in a very fortunate position of having the freedom to withdraw from the witnessing milieu to keep ourselves safe. Do any of you remember some of the aspects of this risk of bearing witness?

Kathleen: I remember you telling me that you couldn’t express your feelings or articulate your experiences when you were in the small bearing witness group at the Retreat. You really lost your voice; you said that you become speechless (Patrice nods in agreement). I experienced the same thing in not having digested the experience enough to form my ideas sometimes.

Anne: (Nods) I had that same experience, Kathleen.

Patrice: Yes, if I hadn’t been able to connect with all of you and debrief what I was experiencing, I’m sure I would have been traumatized in a similar way to Sima when she came back from the camps the first time (Sima nods with understanding).

Anne: I think that witnessing the unexpected had strong emotional repercussions for me, such as anger, shock, sadness, disappointment, and grief. Sometimes there was a delay in actually feeling the emotions from those difficult moments of witnessing, only later did I actually feel the pain. Being able to call home to my husband everyday while I was there was a really important grounding for me. It kind of took me out of the camps and reminded me that I had another life.

Karen: I think sharing a drink of our favourite vodka, eating our meals together, and traveling together was essential for me. One thing that I wanted to mention was that I was quite surprised and bewildered at the complex and strong emotional experiences of the non-Jewish members of our group. You were all affected so strongly.

Anne: (jumps in) I liked that we were all together and that the performance included others and not just the Jewish perspective. That brought truth to the experience.

Kathleen: It’s important to me that you say that, Anne. I think I responded in a way that any normal person would under the circumstances (both Anne and Karen nod in agreement; Kathleen continues). Talking about helpful things as I was witnessing, I have to say that I very much needed to connect with normal things, like washing, eating chocolate, exercising, and having my own familiar things like hand cream (she looks down thoughtfully). That sense of familiarity was comforting, but I was very uncomfortable
with the feeling of familiarity that came with going to the Birkenau site everyday; it was very weird to find myself becoming familiar with that terrible place (everyone agrees).

Sima: Something important for me was when the Retreat organizers wanted us to discuss the reading of perpetrator names, a way of glorifying the murderers. I felt emotionally assaulted (everyone nods).

Anne: I think we all emotionally left the group that night.

Sima: Yes, I agree. I think I spun off into a depression after that. I felt a sense of hopelessness, not only for what happened to the prisoners, but that the Retreat leaders would suggest such an absurd action after I bore witness to the extent of murder and brutality in the camps. It was only when I spoke with the Director of Education at Ravensbrück that I felt alive again.

Karen: Yes, that was very risky—especially to speak out against the idea in the large group. There we were at a huge funeral and, for me, that was no place to honour the executors. There was a risk in being caught up in the group pressure, and momentum; possibility losing perspective. I think that whole event also showed that witnesses can be shamed through their cultural association and beliefs. I think it caused many of the German and Polish witnessing participants at the Retreat to struggle with their place and position after that discussion evening.

Patrice: I think that whole exercise was very unfortunate for all of us; I was emotionally and physically exhausted after that. I noticed that when I got tired it was difficult to witness and take things in. You all mentioned physical risks, too. For example, at different points people experienced indigestion, diarrhea, shaking, cold, shivering, muscle pain, physical illness, vomiting, insomnia, stomach pain, headaches, vertigo, and both increased and decreased appetites. We were really working hard on all levels.

Sima: That is quite something; those are very significant physical risks to witnessing (she pauses). I was one of the people who had an increased appetite! (Laughing, Anne offers her another piece of cake, which she refuses with a smile.)

Patrice: Yes, me too (she takes another piece of cake)! I noticed that one of my reactions when I felt at risk was to do little acts of resistance such as not going to some of the activities during the Retreat, not following along with what everyone else was doing, and reading the names of the murdered differently by adding in the age of their death (see Appendix E).
Karen: I really appreciate that you did that, Patrice. It was very helpful for me. It actually made me feel calm to have had those lives recognized like that.

Kathleen: I agree, Karen (she pauses). I noticed some risks that were more cognitive such as frequent forgetting and losing of my time sense. I remember the time being very, very slow. I sometimes had to do a reality check while being in the camps, reminding myself where I was; bringing myself into the current moment in history. The outer physical space of the camps and the sensory images in the photographs heavily impacted my memory; there were some images that really stuck in my mind and evoked feelings that I couldn't detach from.

Karen: I had that same experience. I also remember both you and Sima talking about things that you said to yourself, like for you Kathleen, “I can deal with this I have seen rotting legs from leprosy, I can stand this” (she nods). And I think, Sima, you said, “I can handle this—I’m a seasoned concentration camp observer.”

Sima: Ya, that’s true. Sometimes I struggled to hold all the facts and horror that I heard in my head. Personally, I was worried about being traumatized like I was the first time and was conscious of being more objective and distancing myself sometimes by stepping back to take photographs, sometimes just pulling into myself and not talking to anyone. At times, I actually moved away from something stressful by leaving. I noticed that I just felt numb sometimes, numbing my emotions. Distancing was helpful but also prevented me from being as present as I might have been to really experience everything fully.

Kathleen: I think that distancing is healthy. I also had a little strategy that helped me separate from what was distressing me, I imagined rolling up a window, like a car window, so that I could both see and protect myself at the same time. It worked very well.

Anne: That’s amazing, Kathleen. I remember both you and Patrice telling me about processing your witnessing experience through dreams. You both had nightmares didn’t you? (They both nod.)

Patrice: Yes, I did. The dreams were frightening, chaotic, and tumultuous. They contained images of the camps and fragments of the stories that I heard. I remember having sensory remnants of the dream during the day (she pauses). I also felt disconnected from the rituals that took place as part of the Retreat activities.

Sima: Yes, I felt disconnected sometimes, too.
Patrice: I remember you telling me that. Kathleen and I also talked about not quite fitting into the religious rituals.

Kathleen: Yes, I felt uncomfortable with the Christian leader. I didn’t think that there was enough interfaith, as the Retreat brochure advertised. By not being connected to the other participants in this way risked isolation, so I was glad that we had each other as a group.

Patrice: Yes, and not being connected with a religious community, I was very lost when the group divided up for the services. I think I really lost the centre of my spirituality in those concentration and extermination camps. The experience there shattered my beliefs about human compassion, and my sense of faith and hope.

Karen: That was a big consequence of bearing witness, Patrice (she pauses). For me, participating in the trip and the performance has threatened one of my personal relationships. It has brought out some cultural differences between us, which we aren’t talking about. This is another risk of witnessing—how personal changes we make because of witnessing, affects our relationships and future actions.

Anne: That is a really good point, Karen (she sets her cup down on the table). I think bringing out that whole shadow piece in the performance was so congruent with what we witnessed and the consequences of the risks we took. I think it is important, too, because we need to see how it infiltrates into what we are all experiencing now. We took personal and social risks to bear witness and seeing and facing the shadow is a part of that risk.

Kathleen: Talking about the shadow piece, I was concerned about mentioning the separation I experienced in the group during the trip as part of the performance piece.

Patrice: The voice about separation was compiled from three different voices in the group.

Anne: Is that right? I didn’t really notice that separation happening during the trip.

Karen: Yes, I didn’t see that part about the group, either. It wasn’t part of my experience, so I am glad you brought it up. I am very sensitive to feelings of separation or struggles with group cohesion. In some ways, it has created a sense of caution for me now.

Patrice: What do you mean, Karen? What makes you cautious now?

Karen: I worry that people are making assumptions about me. I don’t think we’ve had enough time to communicate and sort it out. It was not something I was aware of at the time.

Anne: I agree, Karen. Patrice really brought it out in the performance because it was a seamless compilation of everybody’s stuff, even stuff that we all didn’t know about (she pours
herself some more tea). I would have liked to have been more involved because the performance was a real consolidation of the experience. As I was watching the night of the performance, it really contextualized and normalized the experience of the trip. It made it a reality. I said to myself, "I did it, it is true." So it was helpful in affirming the reality of the experience.

Sima: For me, the performance of our experiences was one of the highlights of my life.

Kathleen: I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the performance in every way. I was able to break a pattern of self-criticism as I went on stage to bear witness to the concentration camps. I didn’t feel as exposed as I thought I would and think this really reflects a shift in me. I also enjoyed getting to know everyone better.

Karen: (smiling) I received some very nice comments about my stage presence from some of the audience members (everyone claps, Karen stands and takes a bow. She sits back down and continues). Being on stage evoked feelings of vulnerability in me because I realized that people could hear me and were listening to what I had to say. The fact that the voices were compiled made it a bit more risky for me, as I was saying something that wasn’t always my own.

Patrice: Yes, that was a risk for us all. How are you with that now?

Karen: I was mostly concerned about that last line, "Going to the concentration camps, I ended up forgiving the very people I was raised to hate." It wasn’t true for me so I was glad to say, "Going to the concentration camps, I forgot to remember the hate I was raised with." That was an important change; I didn’t think about that line until I realized people would actually hear me say it.

Patrice: I’m glad it ended up being alright for you (she looks at her watch). Well, it’s two o’clock already and I know that you all have places to go this afternoon. We made a time to meet next week, didn’t we? (Everyone nods.)

Karen: As a reminder, it’s at eight o’clock Thursday evening, at my house.

Patrice: Great! We can talk then about where we will go from here, as we have already had three institutions asking for us to present our performance--more opportunity for social action and bearing witness. So, I will see you all then.

Anne: Here, Patrice, you can have the last piece of cake.

Patrice: Thank you! (All help to gather cups and plates, then exit to the kitchen.)
Cultural Meaning in Vicarious Witnessing

As indicated above, our witnessing group became a collective where each of us could go for support when coping with emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually evocative experiences from witnessing and vicariously witnessing in the camps. Although we varied in our cultural perspectives, we depended on one another and interwove our different points of view, beliefs, and values to maintain our individual safety within the group. As our relationships developed and our values and beliefs became more prominent, numerous cultural aspects arose. For me to ignore this very important and interesting aspect of the study, would be ignoring the biases of my own perspective. Thus, to be transparent, I outline in this section specific cultural aspects that I consider important in the process of witnessing in the concentration and extermination camps of Europe.

Entering into a witnessing experience in a country where participants felt cultural tension proved to be an important influence on all members of our group. From the start, it became clear that participants carried strong cultural beliefs in relation to the people of Germany and Poland. Jewish members openly spoke about a sense of distrust towards these cultures due to the massive consequences of the Holocaust experience on their families and their place in the world community. As a person without knowledge or experience of the kind of oppression suffered by people who are Jewish, my original view of German culture was based solely on my understanding of philosophical thought originating from German thinkers. I really came to understand the Jewish perspective when I viewed historical films about the Holocaust and Hitler’s rise to power; read about pre-war activities in the Reich and Holocaust survivor testimonies; and witnessed a number of anti-Semitic actions by people from Germany and Poland towards participants who were from the Jewish culture. These experiences intensified my emotions and expanded my understanding of the razor-sharp edge of racism. I found myself becoming aware of cultural nuances in our group, and being cognizant of how I was communicating for fear of offending any of the participants. Interestingly, my cautious approach was countered by another group member who spoke with open negativity about a specific religion in conversation with a member of that faith. In general, I believe that we carefully, and sometimes carelessly, explored the boundaries of cultural acceptability within the safety of our own group.

During my experience in the concentration camps and with the Bearing Witness Retreat group, I saw how oppression affected people in a personal way. For example, during one of the large Bearing Witness evenings a long discussion took place about the acceptability of a small
group of participants reading the names of Nazi perpetrators on the Birkenau site. Some anti-Semitic comments were spoken by people from Germany and Poland that night. This left one of the participants in my study feeling very isolated. The anti-Semitic comments cut deeply into her heart creating self-doubt about her worthiness and her place in the Bearing Witness Retreat group. She expressed feelings of hopelessness and resignation such as, "It’s expected; we were all raised to be anti-Semitic...I’m not surprised...nothing’s changed." This experience is understandable in light of the amount of education and memorializing of the consequences of cultural oppression during World War II that we witnessed in these two countries. Ironically, the crimes were not only perpetrated on people who were Jewish, but also to many, many others who were caught in the cross-fire. It seems like the momentum of cultural segregation and isolation is extremely difficult to halt.

I also noticed how some participants in the study filtered their experiences through a cultural lens. Everyone tended to interface or compare the vicarious witnessing experience with their own personal/cultural/political contexts and experiences. What was familiar created a framework into which the experience fit. When something unexpected or unknown arose, it was not immediately processed but instead it was discussed with others who helped to form a cultural framework on which to make sense of the new experience. To illustrate this I offer two examples. First, in the written text of one participant her preferences for the cultural views of Protestants versus Catholics, Israelis versus Palestinians, and Jewish versus non-Jewish perspectives created a framework for her to make sense of her witnessing experience. When she writes about the city of Krakow, she holds the Catholic church responsible for Polish anti-Semitism, "The awful thing is that the Poles are still anti-Semitic, unrepentant, non-responsible and their catholic church for the most part continues to keep the whole thing going." She goes on to criticize "Muslim clergy in Britain who preached racism and hatred from their safe pulpits." In a second example, when our group was traveling between Warsaw and Krakow by train we discussed the issue of reparation through property claims for stolen land and material goods. As we were talking, I realized that I was seeing the issue of reparation from the perspective of my dominant cultural position rather than from that of the Jewish claimant. Because a history of oppression and a loss of land and property are not within my own or my family’s reality, I saw myself standing at a distance from the experiences of some of our group members. I was acutely aware of my embeddedness in my own culture. Through our discussion, I was able to push the boundaries of my perspective and see a standpoint that was previously unknown to me.
Although I heard all participants speak about having a greater intolerance for cultural oppression, I noticed some felt more exclusive and protective as the witnessing experience progressed. One participant said that she felt “less interested and tolerant of the Germans” upon her return to Berlin from Auschwitz-Birkenau. During the practice for the performance, one person changed her line from “I found that I really liked being with German and Polish people” to “I found that I really liked being with German and Polish participants” of the Bearing Witness Retreat because “it is less inclusive.” And as mentioned in the previous section, another participant changed her last line, “going to the concentration camps, I ended up forgiving the very people I was raised to hate,” to the more ambiguous statement, “going to the concentration camps, I forgot to remember the hate I was raised with.”

Participants noticed changes in their cultural perspectives after we returned home. One participant spoke about her witnessing experience as allowing her to revisit and rewrite the script of her early experiences of hating and distrusting people of Polish or German descent. This participant was able to feel comfortable speaking with and getting to know people from Germany and Poland during the Retreat. Another participant stated that she “ended up forgiving people” she was raised to hate and being “filled with the milk of human kindness.”

For me, as a vicarious witness to this crime against humanity, which focused on a culture different than my own, I found myself becoming more intolerant of oppressive acts and keen to add my voice to those who remember about, and protest against the atrocity of genocide. More importantly, I am adamant to recognize the form and meaning of oppressive and racist language if spoken by me or anyone else, including my family and friends. Because language constructs realities, this recognition is a first step in changing how I might speak about people and the way I hear what others say. Poignant examples of oppressive language permeate Holocaust history, such as exterminate or liquidate versus murder, shipment or load versus people, and the Final Solution or the Operation versus genocide. Further, as a full group, we joined together to speak about our experiences in the camps through a performance in hopes of opening the door for people to discuss racism and other oppressive issues that create intolerance between cultures. Finally, individual participants constructed different ways of creating an “antidote” to Jewish oppression in Europe, such as donating money to Jewish organizations and creating Holocaust education materials.

Finally, the Bearing Witness Retreat organizers, within the culture of Buddhism, attempted to direct Retreat participants towards a specific witnessing perspective related to spiritual connection and healing. This structure was embodied in the form of almost continuous
rituals and religious services. The intent of the rituals were to create communion among Retreat participants so that we might have the opportunity to honour the murdered, express strong feelings, create a sense of hope and healing, move towards action, and make sense of our witnessing experiences. Within this structure, we as participants from Vancouver developed our own rituals to honour the people whose names we carried from home. We planned and structured our own experience specifically for witnessing, vicarious witnessing, and telling. As a group, we talked often with each other to disperse the impact of the trauma we vicariously witnessed in the camps. Most importantly, we constructed a forum for bearing witness in our own community.

Vicarious Witnessing: Implications for Counselling Psychology

At the onset of this project, I set a goal to initiate a greater understanding of the vicarious witnessing experience from the perspective of the witnessing participant. Here now, I outline my understanding as it relates to the field of counselling psychology.

Perception and Imagination in Vicarious Witnessing

This project supports and expands current ideas about perception and imagination in terms of empathy, human compassion, and social action. Imagining the experience of an other starts within the personal framework of the culturally embedded self— one's own sensations, thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs. The more intimately woven the witness’s own life is with the life of the other, the deeper the connection becomes to other’s experience. This personalization elicits an empathic response which finds the witness suffering with, and for the victim, resistor, or survivor of concentration camps. This personal aspect continues in the participant’s process of trying to grasp the anonymous multitudes, by focusing on the few as personal representatives of the many. Further, as witnesses language their perceptions and experiences through conversation, I notice parallel experiences (e.g., speechlessness, guilt, shock) with the same camp prisoners to whom they identified so closely. Additionally, witnesses’ knowledge about the other increased reciprocally with their knowledge about themselves. Through the imagined other, they expanded their framework for defining themselves and their own situation. This act of comparison appeared to be the inspiration that motivated witnesses to speak out on the other’s behalf, take a morally responsible position in the community, and change their own attitudes and behaviours.

In terms of interfacing perception with imagination, witnesses reported struggling with holding both in consciousness at the same time. This is important for the trauma counsellor as focusing on outer perceptions when working with client survivors may be a useful strategy for
protecting oneself from vivid traumatic imagery. Additionally, it appears as if imagination is bound by known experiences. Witnesses reported that hitting the limit of their imagination was both a relief and a frustration. As witnesses’ knowledge about the traumatic experiences of camp prisoners increased through observing evidence (e.g., actual camps structures, personal effects, photographic images) and hearing or reading stories, the more able they were to fill in the gaps of a story and build a clearer and more exact image of the trauma. Thus, I propose that for therapists or other helping care-givers, the process of imagining survivor’s trauma stories may involve increased familiarity as the therapist accumulates information about the type of trauma the client reports. This cumulative aspect may be the basis for vicarious traumatization.

Social Relationships in Vicarious Witnessing

As indicated in the theory and research on secondary traumatization in therapists outlined in chapter two (Arvay, 1998; Catherall, 1999; Iliffe and Steed, 2000; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman, 1999; Ziegler and McEvoy, 2000) being socially connected was noted as the most important means of dispersing the effects of hearing about, and imagining survivor trauma. In the vicarious witnessing experiences described in this study, social relationships were also an important aspect of the witnessing experience for a number of reasons. First, participants spoke about conversation and dialogue as essential means to debriefing their experiences in order to make sense of what they had perceived. As well as acting on spontaneous opportunities to debrief, participants also set aside times to meet formally for check-ins and conversations during the concentration camp experience. These conversations assisted the participants to express feelings, form opinions, connect to a foundation of normalcy, and make meaning out of the unimaginable.

Second, the concentration camps of Europe were all about people and their actions, shadows, terrors, tragedies, spirit, ingenuity, hatred, alliances, and so on. Through this intense vicarious witnessing of the other, participants were able to see many aspects of themselves, some expanding and redefining the framework of their own identity. This seamless connection to the other helped participants explore and act on their own cultural biases and social conduct. Shifts in relationship to others were noted and discussed in participant conversations. For example, Kathleen described “having a voice again” in group situations, Karen spoke about struggles with a current relationship based on cultural differences, and finally I noted awareness of cultural bias previously unknown to me before the camp experience.

Third, participants noted aspects of group inclusion, control, and trust as a necessity, but also a hindrance. At times, the limits of social norms and the intensity of implicit social
tensions created a distance from the vicarious witnessing experience. These social influences sometimes blocked the witnesses’ ability to perceive in the moment of witness. Further, self-doubt was expressed as witnesses struggled to make sense of their own experiences and thoughts about their perceptions within a structured social milieu where behavioural norms were tacitly established.

Fourth, associations with other people offered participants models for current and future behaviour. All participants connected to other people, both perceptually and imaginatively, who modeled aspects of the self for which the participant strived. For example, Karen connected imaginatively with Janusz Korczak, the director of a children’s orphanage during World War II, as a model for courage, kindness, loyalty, compassion, and generosity. Kathleen connected to an older woman during the Retreat who provided her with a model for survival, reparation, courage, and aging with dignity.

Finally, participants saw themselves as members of a world community that was connected to, and influenced by the horrors of genocide. They acted as representatives from other parts of the world who could see and believe what happened in the concentration and extermination camps in Europe. Because they witnessed the camps and vicariously witnessed the trauma, they were determined and able to tell others about it and perhaps make a difference in changing the attitudes and behaviours of those that would listen. The telling seemed to be an important aspect of their social responsibility, as well as offering them the opportunity to have a sense of control in relation to social order and public expression of their feelings and perspectives.

Witnessing After-Image Experiences

In chapter two, I suggested that the witnessing after-image involved the experience of an event spontaneously living into one’s sensations, thoughts, and dreams. It is almost as if the after-image of an event is perceived physically in or around the body; a blended inner and outer experience. It seems to linger for an indefinite amount of time and once the after-image dissipates, it cannot be recalled or re-experienced. This after-image experience reported by participants may be related to re-experiencing phenomenon (APA, 2000) of traumatic stress such as intrusive thoughts, flashback memories, and nightmares.

van der Kolk (1996) hypothesizes that trauma is organized on a perceptual or nonverbal level. He believes that trauma memories of this kind are initially experienced as “fragments of the sensory components of the event: as visual images, olfactory, auditory, or kinesthetic sensations; or intense waves of feelings” (p. 287). His research appears to support the notion
that when “memories cannot be integrated on a semantic/linguistic level they tend to be organized on more primitive levels of information processing” such as visual images or somatic sensations (p. 289). Thus, the shock of a traumatic event is embodied; the body perceives, responds, organizes, and remembers. van der Kolk believes this is the basis for spontaneous re-experiencing of intrusive thoughts about the trauma, the shock of sensory based flashback memories, and frequent nightmares. The process of integrating the trauma memory from this embodied experience leads me back to my understanding of language as being rooted in perception where linguistic thought is dependent and connected to bodily experience. From embodied experience, I see the possibility for perceptions to find significance in the activity of meaning expression through sensory rather than linguistic signifiers. After-image, intrusive thoughts, flashback memories, and nightmares all seem to be natural responses and means of re-organizing or reconstructing an equilibrium after a shock experience. The after-image response appears to be associated with smaller scale shocks in comparison with flashback memories that signify shock on a larger scale. These perceptual signifiers are expressions of a person’s process towards meaning. van der Kolk’s research (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995) shows that survivors can clearly articulate the experience of flashback memories and intrusive thoughts. Therefore, I speculate that the use of expressive therapies (e.g., art, drama, enactment) for trauma survivors is effective because of the presence of sensory signifiers as a door to meaning. This is important to know in relation to how we practice therapeutic work with trauma survivors.

Risks and Coping in Vicarious Witnessing

Participants discussed risks to bearing witness and how they coped with the consequent stress of perceptions and imagination. First, witnesses noted risks from observing, listening, imagining, and reporting what they witnessed related to emotional, physical, cognitive, social and spiritual aspects of themselves. They noted strong emotional reactions of vulnerability, anger, horror, sadness, shame, and shock. Physically, they spoke about digestive problems, sleep disturbances, headaches, and illness. Witnesses mentioned being cognitively overwhelmed with information that they could not process, experiencing frequent forgetting, loss of a time sense, having images “stuck” in their minds, and feeling overly responsible. Spiritually, participants experienced shattered beliefs, and felt isolated or disconnected from rituals and spiritual services. These reactions reflect the shock and distress that participants experienced when meeting the actuality of prisoner’s suffering in the concentration camps.
These reactions parallel, but do not constitute a traumatic stress response; their duration was short and did not impair daily personal, social, and occupational functioning (Matsakis, 1994).

To cope with their responses, participants spoke primarily about the importance of the group as a touchstone. Additional social connections were made with other members of the Bearing Witness Retreat and phone calls home to family members. Further, witnesses discussed the importance of connecting with normalcy in relation to daily activities (e.g., washing, exercise, eating) and shared pleasures (e.g., drinking vodka, sharing jokes, travel). When participants recognized that they had reached a witnessing saturation point, they talked about withdrawing or distancing as an important means of coping. They accomplished this by leaving the site, taking photographs, or using personally constructed protective techniques (e.g., self-talk, “rolling up a glass window”).

For counsellors in a therapeutic situation, similar risks to listening were reported by Arvay (1998), and Iliffe and Steed (2000) such as strong emotional reactions, physical health issues, changed beliefs, challenges in relationships, and isolation. For witnesses, the recognition of a saturation point, where perceptions became overwhelming and could no longer be processed, signaled a need for responsive measures such as leaving the site, connecting with the group or another person, or depending on their own personal protective or distancing techniques. In the freedom of a public setting, witnesses could take action for self-protection. In the context of a therapeutic setting, the therapist may ignore, or be unable to act in an effective way on a recognized saturation point. This situation calls for helpful and effective supervision, healthy peer group relationships, and a case load that allows time for lingering after-images or intrusive thoughts to dissipate.

Other research shows that vicarious witnessing through the medium of television has serious psychological repercussions for the general public (Pfefferbaum, et al., 1999; Schlenger et al., 2002; Slone, 2000). Researchers believe that probable posttraumatic stress and other psychological distress symptoms are associated with the content of trauma-related programs and the amount of television viewed. For trauma survivors, viewing television images may trigger trauma responses and extend the reparation process. This calls for counsellors to educate trauma clients about the risks of watching trauma-related programs and newscasts. Extending this aspect of education for trauma survivors, counsellors may also help survivors to recognize and act on saturation point experiences, as well as developing and expanding client’s personal coping processes. Last, understanding the power of imagination and its connection to
perception may offer survivors new ways of dealing with known triggers and working towards the reparation of traumatic shock experiences.

Finally, as a means of coping witnesses sought and lived into moments of human reparation. These experiences offered hope and an affirmation of life and relationship. To participants, witnessing or vicariously witnessing psychological reparation in an other meant that reconciliation and change were possible. Witnessing trauma repair in another person became a model that offered ideas, possibilities, inspiration, hope, normalcy, and relief for participants. Two examples of reparation involved witnessing an older woman, who was a "hidden child," find psychological and emotional relief through the social rituals of the Bearing Witness Retreat in relation to the loss and murder of her entire family at the Birkenau site, and witnessing the testimony and art of an older man who was a survivor of the Auschwitz camp. For clients in our counselling practice, witnessing an other's success in the process of repair can be of great benefit for their own restorative processes and perspectives.

*Bear Witness through Public Performance*

An essential aspect of witnessing is the act of telling or reporting what was witnessed. The performance of our collective story was a public ritual that offered us an opportunity for meaningful expression of our experience through the act of performing. As we interacted with our audience, we were able to represent ourselves in a particular way which, in some cases, expanded personal and social frameworks for defining ourselves and our situation. The performance gave us the opportunity to recognize and honour the lives of those we vicariously witnessed--the people who the Nazis murdered and oppressed. It also gave us a forum for informing, educating, and warning the community about war, genocide, racism, and oppression. We were able to negotiate how the telling occurred so that our audience could hear our message and affect change in their own attitudes and behaviours as listeners and members of a social community. In the end, it stimulated conversation among the audience members about the issues we raised. Audience members spoke about who they were in relation to us and some spoke of us as a model for reconfiguring themselves so that they could take further personal responsibility in the community in relation to racism, oppression, and war.

The performance acted as a completion of our witnessing experience. It normalized and contextualized what we witnessed and gave us a sense of purpose, something to stand for, and stand against. The process of working towards the performance further developed our connection to one another and our commitment to future bearing witness opportunities.
Future Vicarious Witnessing Research

Research on the vicarious witnessing process can go in a myriad of directions. Here, I discuss seven areas where this research project points towards future research. First, I see future exploration involving the process of vicarious witnessing to begin with the responses of audience members who witnessed the performance of our collective story. Both written evaluations and recorded group discussions have been left unanalyzed at the present time. This aspect of vicarious witnessing may lead to a clearer understanding of the underlying motivation for social action and responsibility in the witnessing audience. Further work on the performance itself and audience response is forth coming.

Second, the vicarious witness is currently an important participant in the therapeutic process of Therapeutic Enactment (Brooks, 1998; Brown-Shaw, Westwood & de Vries, 1999; Westwood, Keats, & Wilensky, in press) as described in the introductory chapter. Having collected field texts from vicarious witnesses during a Therapeutic Enactment weekend, I am anxious to continue the research process with these texts. Questions arise about the differences in vicarious witnessing in the therapeutic setting as compared to the public setting explored in this study. For example, it is of interest to explore differences related to risk, coping, after-image experiences, and social action.

Third, I believe this project opened up questions about the witnessing process in connection to relationships between perception, imagination, and language. I noticed parallel ideas in the literature on perception, and the literature on language and meaning; ideas about imagination seemed to be intermingled between the two. Both areas of perception and language see people as physically and socially embedded; in perception with the environment, in language with a culture of people. In both cases, the person is influenced by and influences that in which they are embedded. As witnessing is a perceptual and language based experience further investigation needs to take place in relation to the connection between these two processes.

Fourth, I believe that our ability to imagine and visualize images of the trauma experiences of others is a key factor in secondary traumatization. It is possible that through the power of our imagination, secondary traumatization begins. I am especially interested in how people form their own unique images, what constitutes the power of those that “stick” in the mind, and how the images are affected by externalizing them through speaking about them to others, drawing them, or enacting them. Finally, I am curious about the connection between
imagination and perception in relation to the inner trauma image. How is the body involved in the formation of imaginative pictures?

Fifth, the experience of the witnessing after-image warrants particular attention. The purpose and mechanics of the after-image experience in relation to how people process shock is of great interest to me. I am curious about the relationship of the after-image to intrusive thoughts, flashback memories, and nightmares. I believe that each of these experiences is connected in some way that we do not yet know.

In terms of counselling practice, I would like to see more research on the process of personal coping strategies, how people develop their own strategies, what and why some coping strategies work for some people and not others. Additionally, I would like to further explore aspects of preparation and warnings in relation to vicarious witnessing in trauma-related media including television, narrative texts, and visual images. I would also like to see more qualitative research related to the effects of media on trauma survivors, as I believe that we can explore the details of the process more accurately.

Finally, I am interested in the role of the “theatre of witness” as a public forum for the expression of personal experiences that are socially relevant for us all. I see the theatre of witness as having an important role in the reparation and reconciliation of trauma in the community. As one of the participants in this study noted, the performance was therapeutic, and psychological repair could be witnessed as an audience member. The theatre of witness also offers opportunities for people to discuss important social issues, to make changes in attitudes and behaviours, and to create a powerful forum to educate or inform people about issues that often go unspoken.
CHAPTER SEVEN

After Thoughts

I guess the most profound moment was on the eighth day. I was standing alone on the open selection site in Birkenau on the right side of the train tracks that signaled—the end. I was watching about 50 or 60 people from the Retreat walking in allied groups towards the north end of the camp where they would disperse into smaller clusters and perform devotional services in their own faiths aimed at healing the hopelessness of the witnessing soul. As I watched them walk away, I realized I had nowhere to go. There was no religion that was mine, no God to call out to for help in this place of hell. This sense of disconnection took me aback. I dreamed into myself for a moment looking inside to find that spiritual spark that gave meaning to my life. I searched in all the familiar places and realized it was gone—extinguished. I tried conjuring up the feelings that had been so consoling before that moment, to no avail. There was nowhere to go for comfort, nowhere to go to find the energy for my life. I was just heavy, cold, and lost. How did I get here so fast, I wondered. Was it standing among the 17,000 stones at the Treblinka camp—a representation of the number of people murdered in the gas chambers in a single day? Was it the prison barracks at the Sachsenhausen camp where the feeling of torture and despair still lives in the coldness of the dirt floors, the rust on the prison bars, and the wind in the gallows? Was it when I stood in a huge room filled with the human hair of those murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz? Was it when I was alone in the massive grounds of Birkenau walking through the empty barracks where thousands of people suffered atrocities that a million books could never describe? Or was it when I saw that single photograph of the baby laying in the dirt with his umbilical cord and placenta still attached to his dead naked body?

When the cold wind broke into my anguish, I looked up to see the groups in the far distance beginning their services. I stood still, watching the joining, the alliance, the hope I could not find. I had no more thoughts then, I just continued to allow the camp to settle deeper into me. I walked numbly through an opening in the barbed wire fence across from the selection site. I stepped onto the hard cold ground of the camp, answering its call to my despair. I walked slowly through the acres and acres of barracks—imagining how difficult it must have been to believe in a God for those who suffered there. I imagined that I would have been one of those that did not survive. I imagined that all my beliefs would have been shattered into the chaos of the tombstones in the Kazimierz graveyard. I imagined how it would be to die, that empty, on the Birkenau site.
When I returned home, I started to gather the shattered pieces. The being that I was before I left, was not there when I returned. I worked at slowly re-being or being again. For me, vicariously witnessing the trauma of the concentration camps was a veil thickness away from the real thing—perception and imagination identical gates to experience. Now, I stand again, ready to testify to what I experienced. I am ready to stand up, stand for, stand against what I saw evidence of in the concentration camps of Europe. I am bearing witness.
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“May we always have the courage to bear witness, to see ourselves as other, and to see other as ourself.”

-Roshi Bernie Glassman

November 4 - 8, 2002

Peacemaker Community
Bearing Witness
Retreat at
Auschwitz - Birkenau
Appendix C: Interview Protocol I—Pre-Witnessing Interview

**Research Question:** How do individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma through narrative, visual, and evidence-based representations of traumatic events in a public setting?

**I. Information**
1. Describing the research purpose: General explanation—As you are aware, the purpose of my study is to explore how individuals experience the stories that people tell about trauma events. Through listening or watching a reenactment of the trauma, we construct vivid imaginative representations of the event from the fragments of information and images we receive. Understanding this powerful vicarious witnessing process has important implications for the therapeutic work that we do with trauma survivors and those around them. As a participant, I will be asking you to keep track of your experiences as you move through the witnessing event, so that I can understand what it is like for you, what you might struggle with, and how you cope with the content of the stories.
2. Describe the role of the researcher and participants (participant-inquirer, collaborative positioning, interview procedures, recording experiences—journal, photography, art, poetry; stimulating questions for journal)
3. Sign Informed consent

**II. Interview Questions**
1. In as much detail as possible, what is the story behind your desire to be a vicarious witness?
2. How do you imagine your role or responsibility as a witness?
3. How have you prepared yourself as a witness to the stories that you will hear or the events you may experience?
4. How do you imagine situating yourself among the other witnesses and the storytellers?
5. What hesitations and hopes do you have about being a witness in this event?
6. Research shows that witnesses are expected to be accurate observers and reporters of the events that they witness. In this study, I will be asking you to retell one story that you will hear or witness. Presently, we do not know what stories we will witness, so what you will hear or see is not known at this time. However, I expect that the story you will retell will be told in any way that you wish (e.g., telling, writing, poetry, drawing, dancing, and so on). How do you envision that you might create your account?
7. I will also be asking you to record your experiences. This includes keeping track of your thoughts, worries, insights, wishes, and ideas. You may also want to describe aspects of the actual event site or meetings with people that you found to be important, interesting, or difficult for you. You may notice and record physical reactions (e.g., loss of appetite, increased fatigue), strong dream images, and any other aspects of your experiences that you feel would be helpful in conveying the meaning of your experience. What might be the best way for you to keep track of your experiences?
8. How will it be for you to have me participate in the experience with you?
9. Would you like to add anything else or pose any questions to me?

**III. Some Self-Care Guidelines**
Journaling is a helpful way of making sense of a difficult experience.
Talking with other participants or group leaders.
Stepping out of the situation that is creating anxiety and going for a walk (best to take someone with you, even if you do not speak to one another).
Grounding—feet on the floor, sounds in the room, massage hands, neck, or feet.
Interview Protocol II— Post-Witnessing Interview

Research Question: How do individuals make sense of vicariously witnessing trauma through narrative, visual, and evidence-based representations of traumatic events in a public setting?

The purpose of this interview is to allow the participants to tell the story of their vicarious witnessing experiences during the event. I ask follow-up questions from the first interview. I intend to conduct the interview as soon as possible after the witnessing event in order to get as close to the participants immediate, rather than retrospective experience. In this interview, I am interested in four aspects of their experience—their witnessing story, self-reflections, noticed personal changes, and future actions or implications that they anticipate. The questions that follow are open and general These questions are a guideline that help me encourage a deeper telling of the witnessing story and a means of opening the door to the sense they have made of their experiences.

1. How are you making sense of your experience of witnessing in the camps?
2. What stands out in your mind about your witnessing experience as we sit together now?
3. I have asked that participants to tell one particular story, but first I want to invite you to tell or show one of the stories that stands out especially for you.
4. How did you come to witness it in that way?
5. How did you cope? When did it feel dangerous for you?
6. What surprises, challenges, tensions, or struggles did you experience?
7. What shifted for you, if anything?
8. What new part of you emerged through this experience?
9. What did you learn about yourself through witnessing?
10. How was your experience of yourself, other people, and/or life expanded?
11. What pushed you to the edge of what you knew before the witnessing event?
12. What is it like for you to tell or show this story?
13. What are you aware of as the storyteller?

14. Was there anyone that you connected with particularly during this witnessing process? Tell me more about you interactions. What made this person (people) important for you as you went through this experience?
15. What was it about the witnessing context that stands out for you?

16. When we spoke in the first interview, you said that you hope, wished, expected…… How did you experience these hopes?
17. What has changed for you?

18. In as much detail as possible, tell any story that impacted your vicarious witnessing experience.

19. What are you taking away with you from this experience (memorabilia of any kind)?
20. What actions has this witnessing experience inspired you to take?
Witnessing in European Concentration Camps: A Dramatic Reading Against Racism

Taking up an invitation to bear witness to the stories, images, and settings of the Holocaust, a group of Vancouverites traveled to a Buddhist-based Bearing Witness Retreat in Auschwitz, Poland. This dramatic reading, which involves art in the form of photographic images and sculptures, will take you on a journey through the personal and group experiences of the members as they confront the horrors of European concentration camps in Germany and Poland, including the Sachsenhausen, Treblinka, Auschwitz I, and Auschwitz II at Birkenau. As a precursor to oppression and racism, group dynamics and tensions are explored and confronted as members interweave their experiences in the camps with their experiences as a diverse multi-faith group. Through integration and common learning, the group finds that they must stand together against racism. They offer this dramatic presentation as a first step in speaking out against prejudice and intolerance of any kind.

The Dramatic Reading will be followed by a reception where discussion and questions about the presentation can take place. We welcome audience members to join us at the Hemens Center, which is located across from the sanctuary theatre.

Program

The Cast and Crew

Speaker 1
Participant

Speaker 2
Participant

Speaker 3
Participant

Narrator
Patrice Keats

Shadow Voices
Friends
David Ahenakew

Drama Consultant
Alicia Keats

Graphic and Sound Technician
Tom Wahl

Video Technician
Brun Walker

Producers
All participants

Program Photographed By: (Top to bottom) Museum of Danish Resistance, Photographs copied from the Soviet film Chronicle of the Liberation

Images and Facts about Concentration Camps

Ravensbrück was unique, as the only female work camp established by the Nazis. Of the 132,000 Jews, Jehovah Witnesses, political dissidents, Gypsies and homosexuals 117,000 perished (Zechner, January 2003, p.6).

Hair of women murdered in Auschwitz was sold to German firms such as Alex Zink for plantings a kilogram. It was made into cloth. (Auschwitz: A History in Photographs, p. 162)

Warehouses known by the prisoners as “Canada 11” (“land of plenty”) were overflowing with clothing, valuables, and other belongings of people who had been murdered. From December 1943 items were stored and then sent elsewhere in the Third Reich for reuse. (Auschwitz: A History in Photographs, p. 214)

Location of major camps in which millions of Jews and non-Jews were imprisoned, put to forced labor, starved, tortured, and murdered in conditions of intolerable cruelty.

Blue = Sub-Camps and Detention Centers Yellow = Major Concentration Camps Red = Extermination Camps

Ashes of Death: 1941-1945
Program For Performance (continued)
(Front and Back Pages)

Special Thanks To...

Participant in honour of the Bar Mitzvah of Michael Dassady

Participant

In the memory of Eleanor Hallock and Nancy Lavoie

David, John, and Sarah Kauth

Robbie Enns

Hilary Pearson and David Williams

Nan Black and Colin Black

Donated by: David Levy

Compiled by Patrice Keats

Witnessing in European Concentration Camps:
A Drama Reading Against Anti-Semitism

Date: March 22, 2003
Time: 7:30 PM

Sponsored by: The Social Justice Committee of the United Church of Vancouver and the United Church of Vancouver
Program for Performance

Understanding the Number of People Murdered

On the opposite side of this page, each tiny figure represents 1 person that was murdered or died in Nazis extermination and concentration camps in Europe during World War II. All the figures on one page represent 2,700 people.

On the stage in front of you, there are 2,223 pages of figures. These pages represent the approximated 6,000,000 Jewish people that died due to execution, ghetto liquidations, epidemics, exhaustion, starvation, or other Nazi brutality during the war. These people came from an estimated 22,000 Jewish communities that the Nazis systematically exterminated.

In addition to the Jewish casualties, there were approximately 5,500,000 non-Jewish civilians (e.g., euthanasia of handicapped individuals, homosexuals, Roma Sinti) that died from similar causes at the hands of Nazi perpetrators. These people would be represented by 2,037 pages of figures. From a number of sources it is estimated that the total number casualties during the WWII is 55,000,000 people including military and civilian populations. This number of people would be represented by almost 20,371 pages of figures.

It is difficult to quote exact numbers because the Nazi guards did not register all of the children and adults that came through the camps. However, we offer you the following approximate statistics to help you understand the number of people lost in the concentration and extermination camps visited by our group:

Sachsenhausen
- 105,000 people died at Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp or 39 pages of figures

Treblinka
- At peak operation of the Treblinka camp, Nazis murdered up to 1000 people an hour or just less than half the page of figures, and up to 17,000 people in a single day or 6½ pages of figures
- It is estimated that Nazis murdered approximately 700,000 people in the Treblinka camp for the duration of its 18 month operation or 259¾ pages of figures

Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Nazis at the Auschwitz camps murdered approximately 1,600,000 people, represented by over 592½ pages of figures.

At the conclusion of our reading, we invite you to take a closer look at the block of pages that represent the people murdered in the European camps. Also, you are invited to light a candle and leave it on the stage to honour someone that you know who has died.
Introduction to Performance

Introduction to Dramatic Reading

Welcome and thank you for joining us this evening. It is wonderful for us to see so many concerned and supportive faces in our audience. Thank you for your commitment to, and interest in our message.

Given the danger of the present state of affairs in the world, it is extremely timely that we offer this dramatic reading about our experience of vicariously witnessing the traumatic events of the Holocaust during World War II. The Holocaust was the devastating result of racism and extreme human atrocity. Our presentation was compiled and written by Patrice Keats who is a Doctoral candidate in the Counselling Psychology program at UBC. Her dream of witnessing the camps brought our group together as a united front against oppression.

Including Patrice, there are seven Canadians who traveled to Germany and Poland in November 2002. All are present here tonight, except for one who is working out of Sarajevo for the United Nations International Court with the War Crimes Tribunal. Our group includes JM, SA, KP, KW, HC, AW, and Patrice Keats.

In your program, we have included two inserts. The first is a sheet of figures that represent individuals who were murdered in the camps. We offer this representation to you as a means of attempting to grasp the unspeakable loss of life during this event. Secondly, we have included an evaluation sheet, which we invite you to fill in so that we can modify our reading in future presentations. Finally, at the end of the presentation, we would like to invite you to add a memorial candle to those we will light in memory of people that died due to racism or oppression. I will guide you to the stage and ask that everyone remain seated and quiet as we honour the dead. Once everyone who would like to light a candle has done so, we invite you to Hewett Hall (outside to my right), where we have provided food and drinks. If you would like to remain after the refreshments, we would like to give you the opportunity to ask questions and discuss your thoughts or reactions to our presentation. As the information on this discussion will be of value for future research on the witnessing process, we will be recording the discussion with videotapes.

This presentation would not be possible without the gifts, donations, and support that we have received from our friends and family, as well as the Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver and the Vancouver Multicultural Society. We heartily thank you all.

Finally, current photographs in our presentation are accredited to AH, Patrice Keats, and WD and archival photographs were obtained from the Auschwitz Museum in Poland. Patrice Keats created all sculptural artwork.

Now let us begin.
Audience Evaluation of Performance Form

Evaluation Form:
Witnessing in European Concentration Camps: A Dramatic Reading against Racism

Thank you for taking the time to write about your response to, and thoughts about our presentation. Please address as many of these aspects as possible (please use the other side of this sheet if needed):

What did you think of the general structure of the Dramatic Reading (e.g., timing, lighting, sound)?

How did the sensory experiences (e.g., photography, voice recordings, setting) help you understand our experiences?

How were the different perspectives of the speakers helpful for you in understanding our story?

What statements in the Dramatic Reading stood out for you? Why?

What aspects of the presentation drew you into the experience while watching the Dramatic Reading?

How do you think the Dramatic Reading reflected the truth about vicariously witnessing the concentration camps? Was our experience believable in the way that we presented it to you?

How did the presentation affect you emotionally?

What were some of the speaker’s experiences that you share or identify with in your own life?

What social or personal actions would you like to take after seeing the Dramatic Reading?

(Place Evaluation form in the drop box located by the main entrance by the Sanctuary)
Appendix E: Honouring and Remembering: Naming the Murdered

Names of Family Members Related to Participants in the Bearing Witness Retreat

Family of L. De Jong
Her parents:
Charles de Jong  13-07-1906/6-02-1943 Auschwitz (age 37)
Catharine Spiero  28-10-1903/9-11-1942 Auschwitz (age 39)

Her grandparents:
David de Jong  13-7-1875/26-2-1943 Auschwitz (age 68)
Hesseline Lion  05-8-1876/26-2-1943 Auschwitz (age 67)

Benjamin Spiero  25-1-1885/22-10-1942 Auschwitz (age 57)
Sara Verveer  20-5-1886/09-11-1942 Auschwitz (together with her mother) (age 56)

Family of her father:
Joseph Adam Mozes (her uncle Jo)  20-1-1899/20-03-1943 Sobibor (age 44)
Sophia de Jong (her aunt Fie)  09-1-1903/15-12-1942 Auschwitz (age 39)
Serina (Riny) Mozes  24-7-1927/15-12-1942 Auschwitz (age 15)
David (Daafje) Mozes  11-5-1933/15-12-1942 Auschwitz (age 9)

Family of her mother:
Abraham Spiero (her uncle Bram)  17-2-1909/31-12-1943 Auschwitz (age 34)

Emanuel (her uncle Manie) Spiero  27-9-1912/30-6-1944 in the middle of Europe (age 32)
Hendrika Koekoek (her aunt Rie)  29-3-1908/28-1-1944 Auschwitz (age 36)
Nico Spiero  14-4-1939/28-1-1944 Auschwitz (age 5)
Robbie Spiero  23-5-1941/28-1-1944 Auschwitz (age 3)
Benjamin (Ben) Spiero  24-6-1937 committed suicide January 1981 (age 44)

Betsy Spiero  6-2-1917/28-1-1944 Auschwitz (age 27)

Family of Hinda Avery from Staszow
Grandmother--Chaya Rozen,
Aunt--Pessy Rozen
Parents--Sima and Mier Rozen

Family of M. Lansky
Grandparents--Max and Amalie (Amalia) Loewenberger
Aunt and Uncle--Edita (Edith) Berger and Karel (Carl) Berger (recently married)
Transferred from Teresienstadt in Czech (apparently on October 31, 1941) to Lodz and then to Auschwitz. They died at Auschwitz.

Names of Family Members related to Community Members in Vancouver, BC

Albersheim, Lena and Otto from Lengerish
Dermer, Moshe and Yaakov —from Bukarina
Diczek family—Bernie’s father had 8 brothers and sisters, married and with children plus grandparents, aunts and uncles, all other relatives all lost - 5000 of their friends and neighbors.

Dworkin family
Fekete(Feldmar), Elishbeth--from Budapest
Geiringer, Erich--father of Eva Schloss who is stepdaughter of Otto Frank
Hamo, Wolfe and extended family-- from Lodz
Jerzy’s family from Warsaw
Katzenstein, Dorothea Elisabeth
Katzenstein, Leopold from Wiesbaden- Thereisenstadt - 1942
Kellman, Ellie --family lost
Leah, Devorah from Wiesbaden - Auschwitz 1944
Meyer, Freida--from Cologne
Perlmuter, Joseph and family --Joseph Zaide’s grandfather--from Bozenov
Rosenberg, Moshe and Shimon from Bialystock
Shrentzel, Michael--from Bukarina
Spiegel, Pearl--from Bukarina
Tietz family
Ury, Hedwig-- from Ulm
Walli and her husband--from Vienna
Zadrazil, Carrie--lost family from Salonika, Greece, and their friends
Zuskin family

Some Names of Unknown Individuals Read at the Auschwitz II-Birkenau Selection Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth/Death</th>
<th>Identification Number</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Badrian, Betti</td>
<td>12.2.1924, Berlin, 8.9.1942</td>
<td>29189/1942</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badura, Henriette</td>
<td>19.1.1902, Lazy, 15.4.1943</td>
<td>18693/1943</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badura, Josef</td>
<td>7.2.1093, Karwin, 1.3.1943</td>
<td>12058/1943</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badura, Josef</td>
<td>5.1.1906, Ustran, 19.8.1942</td>
<td>22633/1942</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badura, Julian</td>
<td>16.1.1922, Brudzewice, 24.4.1942</td>
<td>5671/1942</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badura, Kare</td>
<td>17.1.1898, Lazy, 9.3.1943</td>
<td>14171/1943</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badykes, Tamara</td>
<td>30.5.1894, Grodno, 12.4.1943</td>
<td>18989/1943</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badzio, Jan</td>
<td>7.4.1913, Kolonia Rudno, 9.12.1941</td>
<td>3953/1941</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baek, Isidor</td>
<td>15.3.1885, Wien, 9.10.1942</td>
<td>34959/1942</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td>Baer, Lissy</td>
<td>18.2.1907, Pirmasens, 2.9.1942</td>
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