

THE LITERATURE OF SECOND GENERATION HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
AND THE FORMATION OF A POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH IDENTITY IN AMERICA

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Abstract

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Most research on the effects of the Holocaust and its place within modern America has revolved around the survivors themselves—their stories of survival, assimilation, and memories. However, there have been few studies examining the impact of the Holocaust on the children of these survivors and how their responses ultimately demonstrate a larger social trend of a Holocaust-centric Jewish identity in America. The definition of what it means to be Jewish, especially in America, has undergone a number of changes since the end of World War II. Today, the Holocaust has become the solution to the problem of a splintering Jewish community. It has been appropriated as a symbol around which American Jews can firmly establish their identity; being affected by the Holocaust has become what it means to be Jewish. Many of the Second Generation Holocaust survivors define themselves as Jewish because of the Holocaust and their parents' experiences, despite a possible lack of religious practice. This thesis will trace the role of the Holocaust in America, going from the overall lack of awareness immediately after the war and moving towards the sense of hyperawareness that exists today, apparent within the literature of these Second Generation survivors. It will demonstrate that the effects of the Holocaust have reached beyond the original survivors and the repercussions of this historical event are felt even today. Through an analysis of these Second Generation authors and the treatment of the Holocaust throughout postwar American history, this thesis will argue that the influence and results of the Holocaust are still central

today to the formation of a collective post-Holocaust Jewish identity. The children of survivors are struggling to define what it means to be Jewish in America and subsequently redefining what a Holocaust survivor is. This thesis will be an attempt to integrate those of the Second Generation into a larger historical discussion of the Holocaust in America.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Raymond Sun, without whom I would not be where I am today. His guidance and determination have inspired me to continue on this academic path. I only hope that one day I can inspire a student as much as you have inspired me

To my committee, whose hard work and dedication have made this thesis what it is today.

And to my parents, who have stood by me through the endless years of school and have supported me in every way possible. I love you both and am eternally grateful for all the opportunities you have provided for me.

INTRODUCTION:
**THE GENESIS OF SECOND GENERATION HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS’
IDENTITY CREATION**

In terms of Jewish practice, the Holocaust has made me more aware of being a Jew.¹

To most of the world, the Holocaust represents a unique experience for one generation of European Jewry. Media from all nations alert people to the natural death of each survivor, like a morbid countdown until the effects of the genocide no longer have to be acknowledged through the continued presence of a survivor. But what so many fail to recognize is that the Holocaust has spread and continues to spread, from those First Generation victims to their offspring, referred to as Second Generation Holocaust survivors. The extent to which this event has impacted the children of these survivors, or even further generations, has not been fully explored. There have been a number of writings discussing the history of the Holocaust in America. However, these have focused entirely on the role of the survivors themselves – their stories of survival, assimilation, and their memories. There has been no historical

¹ Meyer Goldstein, “Five Children of Survivors: A Conversation,” in *Living After the Holocaust: Reflections by Children of Survivors in America*, Lucy Y. Steinitz with David M. Szonyi, ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1975), 42.

analysis of the role their children have played in the Holocaust's history in America. The majority of the books dealing directly with the Second Generation survivors are written primarily by psychologists in an effort to analyze the mental trauma felt by these children.² Few studies delve into how that trauma is transferred into identity construction for the Second Generation in America. Understanding the psyche of the Second Generation, however, is crucial to understanding the state of modern American Jewry. Perhaps no group understands this better than the Second Generation themselves, as they have produced a staggering amount of literature concerning their parents, their upbringing in America, and the Holocaust. This literature does not simply reflect a modern Jewish identity; the literature aids in the creation of that identity.

Situating that literature amid the many changing roles of the Holocaust in America is key to understanding how literature can create a people's identity. The role of the Holocaust in America has undergone a number of changes since the end of World War II, shifting from an overall lack of awareness immediately after the war to the eventual hyperawareness that exists today. While the literature of these Second Generation survivors both mimics and creates a Holocaust-centric Jewish identity, it is the historian Peter Novick who first

² See: Dan Bar-on, *Fear & Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Hillel Klein, "Families of Holocaust Survival in the Kibbutz: Psychological Studies," in *Psychiatric Traumatization*, ed. H. Krystal and G.H. Niderland (New York: Little, Brown, 1971): 67-92.

established this argument in the 1990s. He examines both the history of and the present-day position of American Jewry. He argues that the Holocaust has taken on a new and profound importance to Jews in America today as a response to a shattered Jewish identity. For Novick, the Holocaust became the means by which this otherwise fragmented community has been able to identify with one another and unite around their only shared experience. The Holocaust did not attain this degree of importance during World War II or its immediate aftermath. During the war itself, discussions of the Holocaust did not revolve around Jews. The idea or even the term Holocaust was not present yet, nor was it viewed as a uniquely Jewish experience. The emphasis was placed on a universal victim. When it was mentioned, stories of the Holocaust were greeted with disbelief. There was no hard evidence, and no factual articles could be published. There was an overall lack of awareness about the Holocaust in America during the Second World War. It was not until almost twenty years later that the Holocaust became widely known both within the Jewish community and in America as a whole.

The shift from naiveté to hyperawareness is apparent in the literature of these Second Generation survivors.³ Sifting through the literature of Second Generation survivors provides a unique opportunity to understand the process of self-identification. This literature—fiction,

³ See included appendix of Second Generation writers.

poetry, and non-fiction—as well as the production of the literature illustrate the unique issues the Second Generation must face. Deborah Schiffrin, in her article “Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity,” discusses the ways in which literature can have a profound impact on the study of identity construction. Schiffrin writes about verbalization, a process which focuses on, “the way we symbolize, transform, and displace a stretch of experience from our past – what we have done, and what has happened to us – into linguistically represented episodes, events, processes, and states.”⁴ Through the Second Generation authors’ various approaches to the verbalization of their personal Holocaust history, a collection has developed which isolates the Second Generation into a unique sect of survivors completely isolated from the First Generation. This act of verbalization on the part of the Second Generation separates them from their survivor parents, a distance that is necessary in order for these authors to address the splintered Jewish American identity. Schiffrin later writes that through verbalization, “we situate [an] experience *globally*: by drawing on our cultural knowledge and expectations about typical courses of action in recurrent situations, we construct story topics, themes, and points.”⁵ So, through the simple

⁴ Deborah Schiffrin, “Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity,” *Language in Society* 25, no. 2 (1996): 168; Schiffrin also notes that the term “verbalization” comes originally from William Labov.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 168; author’s original emphasis included.

act of transforming personal history into a narrative structure, the Second Generation authors have placed that literature, and subsequently their identity construction, on a global platform. That global platform not only allows for the world to better understand the plight of the Second Generation, but it also provides the space necessary for these authors to reach out to fellow Second Generation survivors, so that identity construction can occur on a global level.

Still, for the American Second Generation authors, there is a more intimate discussion happening, which Schiffrin allows for by arguing that, just as verbalization provides an opportunity for experiences to be relayed globally. It also “situates [an] experience *locally*: we verbally place our past experiences in, and make them relevant to, a particular ‘here’ and ‘now,’ a particular audience, and a particular set of interactional concerns and interpersonal issues.”⁶ While these authors are able to represent modern Jewry on a more global level, by the simple act of publishing and distribution of their narratives, authors are still able to evoke a more personal conversation, one between the Second Generation victims living in America. For authors like Art Spiegelman and Sonia Pilcer, the particular “here” is the United States; “now” represents a specific time frame that is not necessarily present day. “Now,” for the authors, dances back and forth from World War II up through the present day.

⁶ Schiffrin, 168; author’s original emphasis included.

The literature of the Second Generation, then, can act as both global and local unifier as well as a means to shape identity. However, this literature also provides the authors specifically an opportunity to situate their individual self within a larger, continuously changing Jewish identity. Schiffrin argues, “stories are resources not just for the development and presentation of a self as a psychological entity, but as someone located within a social and cultural world.”⁷ Therefore, an author such as Spiegelman produces literature that acts as a springboard for open conversation among the Second Generation and also provides a way for Spiegelman himself to situate his own being among the social and cultural Jewish worlds in America – which is identity construction. The fact that this kind of literature can operate amid both worlds – the personal and the global – is important to the understanding of American Jewish identity construction. No argument will be made that any of these Second Generation authors set out to achieve the global. In fact, most authors blatantly state in their literature that their goal was personal. For example, Spiegelman’s postmodern spin on the comic, the *Maus* collection, sees Spiegelman write his alter ego in mouse form. His protagonist is Spiegelman himself; the act of writing nonfiction alone signifies an intense personal experience. However, by evoking a topic that affects such a large group of people, Spiegelman inadvertently melds into the larger discussion happening around him. Schiffrin states that, “our identities as social beings emerge as we construct our

⁷ Schiffrin, 169.

own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations.”⁸ Spiegelman’s identity as a member of the American Jewish community, specifically the community of the Second Generation victims, is created through his own attempt to position himself in his father’s Holocaust past.

The literature of these Second-Generation Holocaust writers provides them the opportunity to come to terms with the Holocaust both personally and globally, in terms of their American Jewish identity. While some authors such as Thane Rosenbaum draw from their own experiences to write fiction novels of other Holocaust Second Generation survivors, many authors write their stories as non-fiction novels, frequently mixing their own lives with the details of their parents’ survival. This process is not only present in the lives of those who chose to publish their stories, rather, this literature of these children of survivors is representative of their countless other peers who grew up with Holocaust survivors. While their stories are unique in the sense that each story is personal and individual to each respective family there are a number of commonalities between these authors’ lives that is reflective of other Second Generation survivors, including a number of Second Generation support groups available to those children of Holocaust survivors.

⁸Schiffirin, 170.

Many of these groups list the works of the Second Generation authors as supportive readings for their members. Children of survivors who do not write their own Holocaust testimonies look towards authors such as Spiegelman or Helen Epstein for a vocalization of their own experiences and their own internal conflicts with their parents and the Holocaust. Often children of survivors state that hearing or reading the stories of other Second Generation members is comparable to hearing the retelling of their own experiences. Many of these children of survivors began to understand the extent of the influence of the Holocaust in their own lives either through their own publication of their stories or through the reading of other's publications. Certain authors were able to gain success outside of the Jewish community as well, including but not limited to Spiegelman, Epstein, and Rosenbaum. However, the works by the Second Generation were consistently seen as a means by which other children of survivors could relate to one another in a public forum.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE BEGINNINGS OF A MODERN JEWISH AMERICAN IDENTITY

*The Holocaust, as virtually the only common denominator of American Jewish identity in the late twentieth century, has filled a need for a consensual symbol.*⁹

A shared past, especially one of suffering, can provide a sense of unity within communities and helps define their group identity. It is, however, important to remember that these memories are filtered through the lens of the present. Each person or group will remember events in different ways, based on how these memories can better serve them. Survivors of genocide situate their past, present, and future on these constructed memories. These shared constructed memories become the means by which certain victim groups come to define themselves as a community and also become the motivations behind a number of their common goals. Holocaust remembrance, therefore, can be used as a unifier for the Jewish community of today. This past of victimization is utilized as a means to re-unite a fragmented Jewish community. In the instance of Second Generation survivors these communal memories are based upon the past and used in an effort to establish a definition of

⁹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 7.

a group as a whole. The Holocaust becomes the solution to the problem of this splintering Jewish community. It has been appropriated as a symbol through which American Jews can firmly establish their identity; being affected by the Holocaust has become what it means to be Jewish.

Peter Novick deals intimately in *The Holocaust in American Life* with the centrality of the Holocaust to a modern Jewish identity. He examines both the history and the present-day position of American Jewry. He argues that the Holocaust has taken on a new and profound importance to Jews in America today as a response to a shattered Jewish identity; the Holocaust becomes the means by which this otherwise fragmented community has been able to identify with one another and unite around their only shared experience. Stephen J.

Whitfield places this in perspective in his review of Novick when he writes:

by 1989 the Shoah ranked first as a marker of identity for American Jews. Second in shaping their sense of themselves were the two High Holidays, followed by domestic anti-Semitism. Chugging along in distant fourth place was God. The largest collection of Judaica in Washington is assembled at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum. Last year it welcomed about 50,000 visitors—compared to the two million which the nearby U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum had to absorb.¹⁰

The Holocaust did not attain this degree of importance during the War or its immediate aftermath. It was not until almost twenty years later that the Holocaust became widely known

¹⁰ Stephen J. Whitfield, “Reflections on Peter Novick’s *Holocaust in American Life*: Two Perspectives,” *Judaism* (2009): 1.

both within the Jewish community and in America as a whole. Novick seeks to understand why this delay occurred and what it ultimately demonstrates about the Holocaust in America. His main concern is with the rising importance of the Holocaust in America and the various ways in which this manifests itself. This argument is evident in the literature of the children of survivors as well. As they struggle with what it means to be Jewish in America, they ultimately find their place within this community through their relationship to the Holocaust.

During the War, there was no larger concept of the term Holocaust as it became known later. Any discussions of the Holocaust did not revolve around Jews; it was not viewed as a uniquely Jewish experience at this time. The emphasis was placed on a universal victim.¹¹ The Holocaust as an event was largely absent from American media, and as such there were few, even within American Jewry itself, who were aware of what was happening to European Jews under the Nazi regime. Initially Jews were not the only victims singled out by the Nazis. It was only after Kristallnacht in 1938 that Jews were deported to camps in large numbers. American Jews saw this as a period not unlike others in Jewish history. Most of America was preoccupied with military events; Jews were not in the forefront. When it was mentioned, stories of the Holocaust were greeted with disbelief. There was an overall lack of awareness in America during the Second World War.

¹¹ Novick, 21-7.

Immediately after the war, a preoccupation with assimilation determined the American Jewish response to the Holocaust.¹² Author Hasia R. Diner refers to this period as a “golden age.” Later Diner writes, “Instead of feeling anxious about their status, they [Holocaust survivor immigrants] crafted a series of new communal practices that reflected the dominant themes of the postwar age: prosperity and affluence, suburbanization and acceptance.”¹³ There was a search to fit in with their new country, and as such there was an unwillingness to discuss their status as victims, which could potentially separate them from their new peers. In both Israel and America survivors were not willing to talk of their experiences directly after the war. In the postwar years the Holocaust had not gained the religious or transcendental status that it has now. There was no larger Holocaust awareness comparable to what exists today. There were only a few instances of Holocaust remembrance within the popular culture of the time, including *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Novick writes, “Mention of the Holocaust in other than Jewish newspapers and magazines was rare and usually perfunctory.”¹⁴ There was an overall reluctance to be seen as victims. Initially many Holocaust survivors who immigrated to the United States attempted to assimilate into their new environment and

¹² Novick, 36.

¹³ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 259.

¹⁴ Novick, 103.

remained silent about their previous experiences, even their pre-Holocaust lives. America was their new beginning; they left their old lives and their “Holocaust selves” behind.

Even in the American media the Holocaust in these postwar years was still framed within a universalist setting with an emphasis on diversity; it had yet to become a unifying force for the Jewish community. The story of Anne Frank and her family is one of the most widely known Holocaust accounts in American media. Yet, despite being a story of a Jewish girl and her family during the Holocaust, initial audiences of the theatrical and film adaptations of her diary walked away with a more universal and optimistic view of her story. Alvin H. Rosenfeld quotes from a 1955 review by William Hawkins found in the *New York World Telegram and Sun*, “Producer, playwright, director, and actors have united to make a truly uplifting adventure out of as terrifyingly sordid a situation as it is possible to find in history...One leaves the theater exhilarated, proud to be a human being.”¹⁵ The Americans of the fifties still sought to see the Holocaust in terms of inspiring accounts that everyone should be able to relate to and from which to draw strength, not as a tragic Jewish event.

As World War II ended there was a shift in how the Holocaust was dealt with and what was said in the American public. The Cold War, according to Novick, marginalized the

¹⁵ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “The Americanization of the Holocaust” in *Thinking about the Holocaust after Half a Century* ed., Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 125.

Holocaust. American media often portrayed Jews as Communists, leaving a lasting stigma that further distanced them from their American counterparts; they were no longer seen as victims but rather in a negative light. In an effort to distance themselves from this image many Jewish organizations emphasized their support of American ideals and an anti-Communist stance.¹⁶ Displaced persons camps and American programs that had been originally designed to deal with Holocaust survivors became a refuge for victims of Stalin's regime during the Cold War. There was also a shift in American foreign policy in concern with Germany. The revelations of Nazi actions and brutality initially enraged both the American public and government. With bans on fraternization with the German population and plans for de-Nazification and persecution of those implicated, the United States effectively shunned Germany in the immediate postwar years. However, the threat of a rising Soviet Union quickly transformed American policy. It soon became evident that America was more concerned with rearming Germany in an effort to gain a new anti-Soviet ally than with continuing any sense of revenge against Nazi actions.¹⁷ World War II became "Hitler's War," essentially separating the German public and new political factions from any responsibility for the war. With this shrewd move, the American political system cemented

¹⁶ Diner, 260.

¹⁷ Novick, 88-90.

the Holocaust's definition – a single, horrific event perpetrated by one man and a small circle of fanatical followers. This crude simplification again turned survivors into victims, only now a silent, more metaphysical violence was acted out by the place of sanctuary. This decision furthered a sense of oppression because it signaled to the American Jewry that the Holocaust came from the mind of an evil Hitler and a small handful of bad Nazis, who were punished. Therefore, the pain and suffering caused by the Holocaust should be, for the most part, over. After all, the perpetrators were dead. The fear should be gone. That assessment held true for the larger American public, further marginalizing the Holocaust and its survivors. The Cold War removed any public recognition that had been attributed to the Holocaust as an integral part to Jewish identity or within the Jewish community immediately after the end of World War II.

It was not until the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 that this mentality shifted. This was the first time that the Holocaust was presented to the American public as a unique experience, a separate Jewish experience, isolated from both the war and other Nazi victims. The emphasis was on the Holocaust itself and not just the deportation of its victims or other wartime occurrences. While Israel was the first to initiate this type of emphasis on the Holocaust it quickly spread to America. There were a number of legal proceedings that followed Eichmann's trial, and there was even a move to rescind any statute of limitations for

crimes against mankind.¹⁸ While the Holocaust was still looked at as a warning against totalitarianism and appeasement, the trial itself broke the overall public silence. Jews stood up and acted out against the perpetrators of crimes against their ancestors and their relatives. The trial provided Jews the opportunity to fully embrace the Holocaust as their own. Jews themselves began to look at the Holocaust and announce to the world that it was their experience—they had been the ones persecuted and as such it was now their place to punish those involved. Now there was a distinct entity called the Holocaust that was recognized in American society and a definite shift in focus towards Jewish victims. The Holocaust was no longer lost amongst the shadows of World War II. Instead, Jews acted for themselves in response to crimes against their people and therefore gave the Holocaust its own distinctive identity, a distinctive Jewish identity.¹⁹

As awareness of the Holocaust began to grow, there was a general shift in American society during the seventies. There was a transition from a general lack of awareness to a hyper-Holocaust awareness. American social morale was at a low. Michael L. Morgan writes in *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* that “In the sixties,

¹⁸ Annette Wieviorka, “Deportation and Memory: Official History and the Rewriting of World War II” in *Thinking about the Holocaust after Half a Century* ed., Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 284.

¹⁹ Novick, 144.

American political and cultural life exploded, and by 1965 disenchantment, frustration, and anger were registering in polarization and fragmentation.”²⁰ Vietnam, Watergate, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., John and Robert Kennedy were all indicative of a period of tumultuousness and social disintegration. Images of the United States as an aggressor replaced images of the heroic defender of good against a corrupt regime. Novick writes that the Holocaust became an appropriate symbol for this age of disillusionment.²¹ Religion, which had once been what constituted Jewish identity, was once again being questioned. In the face of Auschwitz the credibility and authority of religion began to falter. Jewish theologians began to write articles and books dealing with these types of religious questions, debating the place of God within the Holocaust. However, the one central motif of each of these authors was the role of the Holocaust and what it meant for modern Judaism.²² Within this framework of a pessimistic and collapsing social structure, the tragic nature of the Holocaust found its place.

The Holocaust became a symbol of tragedy, a largely Jewish experience defined by the atrocities committed against Jews. There was no longer a demand for the universalistic

²⁰ Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60.

²¹ Novick, 112.

²² Morgan, 64.

rhetoric of the previous decades; Jews were able to assert their Jewish identities and their relationship to Holocaust. No longer was the emphasis placed on stories like that of Anne Frank as a universal victim, but on authors like Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, who wrote of their own intimate and Jewish experiences in detail.²³ According to Edward T. Linenthal, Wiesel “insisted on the centrality of both Jewish experience in the Holocaust and of the survivor as witness to the Holocaust.”²⁴ The Holocaust was beginning to become firmly established within Jewish identity and had entered into the core of modern Jewish America. Assimilation took on a new context within this new environment. Survivors felt that remaining silent about the Holocaust was no longer acceptable rather it became its own type of “quiet Holocaust,” a continuation of the Final Solution; by immersing themselves into a new American identity, they were in essence losing their Jewish identity. Throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s there was a new emphasis on reasserting the primacy of a particular Jewish identity over a more universal one. Jewish organizations turned inward, and there was now a search for what made Jews unlike other Americans. Author Jonathan D. Sarna examines this when he writes that “Throughout American Judaism a parallel shift took place.

²³ Levi’s first book *Se questo é un uomo*, or *Survival in Auschwitz* as it was titled in the United States, was re-released in 1958. Wiesel’s trilogy of *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day* was released in 1956.

²⁴ Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: the Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 10.

Whereas during the 1950s and 1960s universal causes like world peace, civil rights, interfaith relations, and opposition to the war in Vietnam dominated the American Jewish agenda, subsequent decades saw greater emphasis on issues of particularistic Jewish concern.²⁵ The emphasis was no longer on fitting in with their American counterparts, but on finding a way in which to reconnect with their Jewish peers. They began to identify themselves not primarily as American Jews, but rather as Jews in America.²⁶

The one commonality that allowed them to fight against this sense of fragmentation was their shared Holocaust experiences. Despite a number of critics' assertions to the contrary, Novick distinguishes that this does not imply that Jewish leaders consciously saw this shift and deliberately began to internalize the Holocaust as a means to unite their obviously fragmenting community, or that there even was an established Jewish leadership that could accomplish this. However, there was the creation of an environment that both created the demand for a unifying factor and allowed for the Holocaust to fill this role.²⁷

Novick writes:

²⁵ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: a History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 306-7.

²⁶ Novick, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

It was very hard to find any other basis on which to ground a distinctive identity shared by all Jews...The only thing that all American Jews shared was the knowledge that but for the immigration of near or distant ancestors, they would have shared the fate of European Jewry...Insofar as it attained mythic status, expressing truths about an enduring Jewish condition, all were united in an essential victim identity.²⁸

Nor was this embracing of a victimized identity unique to American Jews, and as such there arose a type of competitive environment for victim groups. It is here that Armenian resentment of the Holocaust arises as well as tensions between Jews and blacks. Novick refers to this as “Holocaust envy,” where other groups see the Jewish internalization of the Holocaust into their identity and the general American reaction to this as another way in which they themselves are victimized. The idea of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, of it being the most horrible of all horrors, made Armenians feel as though their experiences were by implication less terrible, or even “ordinary.” Or groups such as the Nation of Islam feeling as though their losses during the “black Holocaust” are lost when talking of the six million Jews killed during their Holocaust.²⁹ This tension illustrates why the Holocaust is so central to Jewish identity and its position in America. Other marginalized groups do not have this kind of sense of tragedy to identify with, with the exception of slavery, which is so far removed from modern times in terms of its position in history. Currently, there is a push among white middle-class Americans to address the issue of reverse racism. In contrast,

²⁸Novick, 190-1.

²⁹ Ibid., 192-3.

there cannot be a reverse genocide, seemingly securing the American Jewry as a privileged minority. This, however, is a double-edged sword, since then American Jews are supremely defined by the rest of their country as victims first and foremost.

As the Holocaust moved from the periphery to the center of American Jewish identity, it began to take on a new definition, and this Holocaust environment led to its appropriation by those outside of the Jewish community. Novick states, “Both inside and outside the political arena, it became common to invoke the Holocaust to dramatize one’s victimhood—and survival.”³⁰ The word Holocaust took on a meaning of its own, which continues today. It can be used as a symbol of a personal struggle. Through this use there is a confiscation of the sense of victimization of those who suffered. Even when it is used to refer to the actual experiences of those victims of the Nazi genocide it has taken on a new, almost religious connotation. Now even the term Holocaust survivor is associated more with feelings of veneration. There is the sense of privileged authority attributed to those who survived. Some Jewish writers have even asserted that the Holocaust should become not just a part of modern Jewishness, but also a part of modern Judaism. Emil Fackenheim, a noted Jewish philosopher and rabbi, stated that there should be a “614th Commandment” in which that to forget Auschwitz or to forget Judaism would be simply fulfilling Hitler’s original intentions.

³⁰ Novick, 231.

For Rabbi Irving Greenberg, the Holocaust should be held within the same category as any other Biblical journey or strife that the Jews have endured.³¹ The centrality of the Holocaust to American Jewish identity has given the word a new importance and a new meaning within modern society.

A number of critics object to Novick's assertion that the Holocaust is all that unites modern American Jews today. One such critic, Dr. Deborah Lipstadt, states that an important weakness to this argument is the existence of a number of organized religious Jewish groups. Yet, the fact that there are Jews who actively practice their religion does not negate the fact that these Jews still relate strongly to the Holocaust or the fact that many still define themselves as Jewish and do not either practice Judaism or even believe in organized religion. Lipstadt herself writes, "The Holocaust is important to many of these Jews [those participating in the religious groups previously mentioned]—it may have first brought them inside the door—but it is not what keeps them there."³² While some may list religion as an important aspect of their Jewish identity, the Holocaust is still included in some way in that definition. A religious connection to Judaism does not negate an intimate connection to the Holocaust for modern American Jews. One does not negate the other. However, a number of

³¹ Novick, 199.

³² Deborah Lipstadt, "The Holocaust in the Western mind: how Americans think the unthinkable," *The Boston Globe*, 13 June 1999, C01.

Jewish Americans may still define themselves as Jewish without participating in the tenets of Judaism.

The Holocaust extends outside the boundaries of religion to those who may not practice but still relate to and call themselves Jewish. The existence of religion for a number of American Jews does not mean that this Holocaust-centricity is untrue or absent. Simply because the Holocaust and religion can both be parts of Jewish identity does not mean that the Holocaust is not an integral part of modern Jewish identity. According to the American Jewish Identity Survey, conducted in 2001, in comparison to other American religious groups, a majority of American Jews feel their Jewish identity is secular, respond with “none” when asked what their religious affiliation was, and even fewer list an affiliation with a specific temple or synagogue or believe in the religious tenets of Judaism and God.³³ In a psychohistorical study published by Robert M. Prince twenty children of survivors were interviewed in-depth about their parents’ and their own Holocaust experiences. Of these twenty, only four subjects included “an orthodox religious dimension” in their definition of Jewish identity³⁴. Even Lipstadt herself notes that the Holocaust itself may have in fact been

³³ Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar, “The American Jewish Identity Survey,” *Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Center of the City University of New York* (2001): 9.

³⁴ Robert M. Prince, *The Legacy of the Holocaust: Psychohistorical Themes in the Second Generation* (New York: Other Press, 1985), 94.

the entrance into organized religion for a number of practicing Jews. Marita Grimwood examines a number of common themes among children of survivors in her book *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation*—one of these themes being the existence of a Jewish identity despite a lack of religious beliefs. She writes that the Holocaust is “an event at the core of their identities that provoked a religious awe without a guiding religious doctrine to go with it.”³⁵ The existence of religion for a number of American Jews does not mean that this Holocaust-centricity is untrue or absent.

Berel Lang, a Jewish philosopher, scholar, and author, criticizes Novick’s argument that the Holocaust has taken on an inflated meaning and position for American Jews, claiming that Novick infers that the event itself is “substantially less than it has been touted to be, certainly less consequential than its afterlife has represented it as being.”³⁶ However, the fact that the Holocaust has become central to Jewish identity does not mean, nor does Novick argue, that the Holocaust was not a major and traumatic event in Jewish history. Rather what is argued is that the Holocaust has become the core of American Jewish identity, further supported by the fact that children of survivors first relate to their Jewish heritage through their parents’ Holocaust experiences.

³⁵ Marita Grimwood, *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 39.

³⁶ Berel Lang, “On Peter Novick’s *The Holocaust in American Life*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (2001): 149-158. www.ebscohost.com (accessed November 1, 2008).

Other critics, including renowned Holocaust scholar and author Lawrence L. Langer, assert that Novick draws his conclusions based upon a small portion of the American Jewish community.³⁷ However, the fact that a number of disparate Second Generation authors chose to begin their search for self-identity through the Holocaust and their parents' experiences, the fact that there are a number of common themes throughout their writings, and that these works have been well-received and readily read show that Novick's argument extends beyond a handful into another generation. Novick states repeatedly in his book and in his response to some of his critics that his arguments, ambiguous in nature, draw upon "indirect evidence, on inference, and on what might be termed 'informed intuition.'"³⁸ Yet, the writings of Second Generation authors provide a written account that supports Novick, supports the fact that these future generations are coming together and relating to both themselves and others through the Holocaust. These children of survivors do not exist in an isolated sphere; they are influenced by the trends of the world around them and in turn both reflect these trends and help create them.

The Holocaust is felt so deeply by these authors that they refer to themselves as survivors or witnesses. Bernice Eisenstein writes, "Without the Holocaust I would not be

³⁷ Lawrence L. Langer, "A Sacred Evil: A historian reconsiders traditional views of the Holocaust," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1999.

³⁸ Peter Novick, "Response to Lederhendler and Lang," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (2001): 169-179. muse.jhu.edu (accessed November 1, 2009).

who I am.”³⁹ It would seem almost impossible to separate the Holocaust from this newly created identity as these following generations have no pre-Holocaust life; they have lived their entire lives within the aftermath of genocide, forever impacted and forever marked. Toby Mostysser is not just a child of survivors, but a psychologist as well. During the mid-1970s she began to take an interest in the effects of the Holocaust on the Second Generation, publishing a chapter in Lucy Y. Steinitz’s *Life after the Holocaust: Reflections by Children of Survivors in America* and conducting her own study into this phenomenon. She writes in reference to the Judaism of her parents’ pre-Holocaust life, “Their Judaism, being dependent for its full realization on that community of parents and neighbors, which the war had destroyed, deteriorated into sentimentality.”⁴⁰ Here, Mostysser draws a distinction between the Judaism of her parents’ lives in Europe and the Judaism with which she grew up. She is unclear exactly what her Judaism means exactly; however, she is clear in that she definitively

³⁹ Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 25.

⁴⁰ Toby Mostysser, “The Weight of the Past: Reminiscences of a Child of Survivors” in *Living after the Holocaust: Reflections by Children of Survivors in America*, Lucy Y. Steinitz with David M. Szonyi, ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1975), 13.

identifies herself as Jewish, even though she has “no religious conviction.”⁴¹ For the Second Generation, the Holocaust defines what it means to be Jewish in America today.

Aaron Hass, the son of two Holocaust survivors, is a clinical psychologist based in Los Angeles who travels the world lecturing on the unique situation of the Second Generation. He summarizes this transformation of Jewish identity best when he writes that “my people—the Jews—and their history were, I felt, completely defined by suffering and oppression.”⁴² Being Jewish is now connected with and rooted in the tragedy and burden of the war. The Holocaust becomes proof for those of the Second Generation that their Jewishness is not something that they can deny. Thane Rosenbaum echoes this replacement of traditional Jewish identity with the negative impact of the Holocaust: “Smoke and fire were seen even in places where there was warmth and kindness.”⁴³ This sense of growing from trauma may also be what compels a number of these authors to write their parents’ stories with humor, including S. Hanala Stadner or Art Spiegelman.

⁴¹ Mostysher, 19.

⁴² Aaron Hass, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: the Second Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

⁴³ Thane Rosenbaum, *Secondhand Smoke* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999), 95.

As a whole these children of survivors are born into the Jewish faith, but still feel as though they are outsiders until they can further solidify their own personal connections to the Holocaust itself. In essence, the war and genocide transformed their Judaism. The Holocaust becomes a means for these authors to reconnect to and solidify their Jewish identity as well as a means to unify a fragmented Jewish community, both among the survivors and subsequent generations. Without this experience it becomes difficult for these children of survivors to find their own place within a larger Jewish identity. Rosenbaum writes through his character Duncan, the narrator of *Secondhand Smoke*, that “Auschwitz had shattered such time-honored traditions...The world had been reborn with Auschwitz.”⁴⁴ Before the Holocaust a sense of Jewish identity was bound up in religion. Today the Holocaust has moved to the center of an invented identity; this transformation is accompanied by diminishing religious rituals as now a newfound Holocaust ideology is embraced as identity, essentially replacing real tradition with an oppressive event.

Without this experience it became difficult for these children of survivors to find their own place within a larger Jewish identity. Jewish rituals and religious practices are carried on, at times inconsistently, in the name of tradition—as a way to reassert the fact that their culture and their people had not been destroyed. Sonia Pilcer writes of her religious experiences growing up with two survivor parents, “My mother’s inconsistent rites of

⁴⁴ Rosenbaum, 10, 18.

observation! Bacon and ham were okay, but no pork chops.”⁴⁵ Pilcer’s *The Holocaust Kid* is an autobiographical story of her struggles with the Holocaust in her daily life and what it means for her identity. Her story begins in adulthood. However, throughout the novel she traces back to various childhood memories, effectively showing the reader how the Holocaust is a reoccurring factor in her search for self.

Throughout her novel it is apparent that she is comfortable with her identity as an American Jew; however, this identity is not in fact related to any strict or regular religious practice. In fact, the only time that she is seen either praying or entering a synagogue is for Yom Hashoah, the Jewish Day of Remembrance for those who died during the Holocaust. Spiegelman also demonstrates a lack of religious practice, while still writing a story of his relationship to the Holocaust and his Jewish identity. Spiegelman writes of a scene immediately after his mother’s suicide at her funeral in *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*. Vladek recites the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead. However, Spiegelman chose to read from the *Tibetan Book for the Dead*.⁴⁶ His distance from the traditions of Jewish religion does not affect his own self-identification as Jewish. Spiegelman still sees himself as Jewish without the same religious conviction his father exhibits.

⁴⁵ Sonia Pilcer, *The Holocaust Kid* (New York: Delta Trade Paperback, 2001), 36.

⁴⁶ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, page number.

Discussions of the Holocaust began to adopt religious language in reference to the genocide. Eisenstein writes, “In 2002, my mother and my brother, Michael, decided to join an organized trip back to the holy land, back to Auschwitz.”⁴⁷ For Eisenstein, and other children of survivors, sites of the Holocaust came to replace sites of religious significance. The language used to discuss religion was transferred to the Holocaust. Pilcer writes, “*Our parents survived to bear witness. We, in turn, must be their attestors. Testify!*”⁴⁸ Terminology usually used in terms of religion are appropriated by Pilcer to refer to her parents’ Holocaust experiences and her own duty to remember these events—to testify to her parents’ persecution and carry their stories on for others to hear and remember. Some children of survivors even see themselves as missionaries of the Holocaust; rather than acting as missionaries of their religion they have become the proselytizers of the Holocaust for modern America. Cable Neuhaus writes in “Letter for my Loved Ones (Who Perished),” “Instead, I am an immigrant imbued with the conviction that I am a missionary—that all of us Second-Generation survivors are missionaries.”⁴⁹ The Holocaust is their new religion.

⁴⁷ Eisenstein, 112.

⁴⁸ Pilcer, 79; author’s original emphasis included.

⁴⁹ Cable Neuhaus, “Letter for my Loved Ones (Who Perished),” in *Living After the Holocaust*, Lucy Y. Steinitz with David M. Szonyi, ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1975), 171.

Mostysser writes how Hitler's racial definition of what it means to be Jewish made it apparent that a Jewish identity is not something that can be adopted or denied; it becomes inherently linked to each individual.⁵⁰ Today, it is nearly as offensive to deny the Holocaust as it is to insult the Jewish faith itself. Holocaust denial has become a manifestation of this internalization of the Holocaust in modern Jewish American identity. In an interview with Luke Ford, a convert to Judaism and author of several books dealing with modern Judaism, Bukiet stated, "I feel perfectly Jewish without a religious basis to my experience. I find satisfaction in things human rather than beatific. I find satisfaction in a historical Judaism, in a cultural Judaism, in an ethical Judaism."⁵¹ His identity as a Jew is not related to any religious belief that he has. Rather, he is Jewish because of a long personal history, culminating with his parents and the Holocaust.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, or USHMM, is one concrete symbol of this transformation of American Jewish identity. It is with its creation that the transition of the Holocaust moving towards the center of Jewish identity became evident. With its location in the middle of the National Mall, the USHMM demonstrates this transition and the primacy of the Holocaust for American Jews. There is no other equivalent representation of what it

⁵⁰ Mostysser, 19.

⁵¹ "Interview with Melvin Jules Bukiet," www.lukeford.net (accessed September 16, 2008).

means to be Jewish. There is no other place so uniquely American that represents Jewish identity for outsiders more so than the USHMM. The museum was created by Jews, with the aid of survivors themselves, and ultimately becomes the symbol to gentiles for what it means to be Jewish in America today—a definition that revolves around the Holocaust and embraces its tragic events into a modern Jewish identity.⁵² It is within this environment that the children of survivors grew up, and as such, the Holocaust became just as integral to their lives, to their own identity, as it had to their parents and other Jews in a post-Holocaust America.

⁵² Novick, 202.

CHAPTER TWO:

SECOND GENERATION SURVIVORS, A DEFINITION BEYOND THE NAME

*The Holocaust in Europe is over, but it stays alive and is spreading like a virus through the children of survivors.*⁵³

Defining the Holocaust survivor becomes difficult when the children of those survivors are taken into account. Children of the Holocaust were tied, both physically and emotionally, both to America and to Eastern Europe. Typically children of the Holocaust have been identified as those who lived in a concentration camp as children, but recent studies have included Second Generation survivors as “Children of the Holocaust” as well. This is what is meant when referring to the “Second Generation” – children who were most likely not alive during the Holocaust but nonetheless became defined as the new Holocaust survivors. Because those of the Second Generation were not physically present in the camps, they struggled and continue to struggle to place themselves amongst the survivors. Victoria Redel exemplifies this sentiment when she writes, “Squish in, among the dead and the

⁵³ S. Hanala Stadner, *My Parents Went Through the Holocaust and All I Got Was This Lousy T-shirt: a Near-Life Experience* (New York: Matter Inc., 2006), 71.

living.”⁵⁴ The Second Generation survivors were forced to find their own way, a unique identity, but the First Generation, those who died and those who survived, complicated that process. An identity separate from the First Generation seemed impossible to achieve, by these Second Generation authors, when the past constantly situated itself for the Second Generation as present. Between the past and the present these children of survivors struggled to find their own place within the context of a new Holocaust-centric environment. They did not share their parents’ experiences and knowledge of genocide, yet their lives have continued to be shaped and molded by these events. The children of survivors struggle to solidify their own place within the context of the Holocaust.

Those of the Second Generation may have been born in America, or have immigrated to the United States with their parents after the end of the war. The date or location of their birth is less important, but it is generally sometime between the late 1940s through the 1950s. They are a part of the new Holocaust survivors—the Second Generation of survivors. And while it is true that the exact date of birth is not important to their stories, the time period in which they grew up—that is America in the 1960s and 1970s—presents certain issues that influenced the Second Generation. America, at that time, was in turmoil, politically and

⁵⁴ Victoria Redel, “My Little Pledge of Us,” in *Nothing Makes You Free: Writings by Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors*, Melvin Jules Bukiet, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 59.

socially. America was in a war that deeply divided the country. Socially, America was split as well. Martin Luther King Jr. was leading a revolution, one that not only pushed for racial equality, but it forced the American public to look, perhaps more closely than ever, at its past – a past that included the enslavement and inhumane treatment of millions. Given the social discourse developed by such political and social action, it is not surprising that the Second Generation were compelled to their own process of self-reflection. At this particular time in American history, the culminating social issues as well as the war left the country's public without a foundation; the country could not unite together under one banner. Instead, the people disagreed with each other on almost every major issue.

Such conflict was not new to America, nor has it gone away, but at this unique point in American history, those differences were forced to the forefront of the American psyche. The country was splintered, which affected every subgroup in the United States – including the Jewish American community. Through this time, African Americans fought for a voice and place within the American social space. At this time, bolstered by the successes of uprisings by King and Malcolm X, other marginalized ethnic groups began their own quest for a voice independent from the white majority. Asian American, Latino, and Chicano American communities developed as more assertive social and political identities at this time. While the Second Generation survivors were maturing from children to young adults, these

victimized collectives were successfully creating identities that simultaneously accepted America as home while still maintaining the cultural significance of other countries.

As these Second Generation survivors became adults, they began to look at these collective and personal histories in scholarly pursuits and tell their family stories publicly. The result is twofold: the scholarship and stories as a combined unit both paid tribute to the individual and to the emotional impact as a Second Generation Holocaust survivor, while at the same time they highlighted the sociological and psychological implications of the Holocaust past. Equally, however, the desired result was to employ personal family history in a public discourse – to contribute to the larger conversation of Holocaust narratives that had already started to collect and continued as their generation had families of their own.

While there was a proliferation of published works by these children of survivors during the 1990s, relatively few of them were established authors before they began their journeys into the Holocaust. This burgeoning Second Generation Holocaust literary movement is defined by authors such as Art Spiegelman, Sonia Pilcer, Alan L. Berger, S. Hanala Stadner, and Helen Epstein. As the numbers of First Generation survivors declined, it was increasingly important for the Second Generation to record their families' Holocaust past as a way to situate their own Holocaust narrative into the present, for the future generations and beyond. This was an opportunity for them to open up and publish works dealing

intimately with the Holocaust and its impacts on their lives.⁵⁵ Many Second Generation authors admit that they felt compelled to write these stories. Pilcer writes, “What I wanted, why I yearned to be a writer was to tell stories. My parents’ stories, which were mine too.”⁵⁶ Pilcer articulates what Schiffirin identified as the local conversation. Pilcer wants to tell her parents’ stories – record her family’s place in Holocaust history. However, she also engages the personal when she takes on her parents’ history as her own. For the Second Generation, their parents’ experiences became their stories as well – stories that they felt obligated to share through their writing. By adopting these stories as their own, they are not simply reconstructing images of their parents’ identities. They are recreating their own identities.

Generally their first attempts at writing involved their search for their Jewish identity through their relationship to the Holocaust and their parents. Literary critic, Marita Grimwood states that these authors can gain a more direct relationship to the Holocaust “through authorship.”⁵⁷ The Holocaust forced these children of survivors to place a new importance on their relationships outside of their families. Through writing, the Second Generation can tap into the Holocaust in a way that is unique and separate from their parents’

⁵⁵ Grimwood, 1.

⁵⁶ Pilcer, 8.

⁵⁷ Grimwood, 33.

relationship to the Holocaust. It is not firsthand experience in the same way that their parents suffered in the camps. Still, the writing establishes a relationship to the events of the past and, perhaps more importantly, opens a relationship between themselves and other victims/survivors. Dina Rosenfeld comments in the transcript of a conversation between herself and other children of survivors that “because of the lack of relatives and siblings here, I’ve tried hard to make my community of peers an extended family.”⁵⁸ For authors like Rosenfeld, “trying” manifests itself in the composition of literature. The larger American Jewish community took on a new significance for these children of survivors; it was their relationship with the Holocaust that enabled them to relate to these communities and find their place within them. That relationship can be best represented artistically, through the creation of images in writing.

The Holocaust became an integral part of modern Jewish identity. In fact, it was no longer necessary to know a great deal about the event itself to care about it. Children of survivors believed they were duty-bound to remember an event they never witnessed themselves and to pass these memories on for future generations and for others who do not share their intimacy with the Holocaust. They have transformed themselves into translators of the Holocaust. While they did not know it as intimately as their parents, “what the Second

⁵⁸ Steinitz, “Five Children of Survivors: A Conversation” in *Living After the Holocaust*, 41.

Generation know better than anyone else is the First Generation.”⁵⁹ It became their duty to once again “Never Forget.”

Grimwood goes on to make a key distinction about this literature. She writes that these works do “not *represent* the Holocaust so much as respond to its ongoing effects in the present.”⁶⁰ But Grimwood fails to understand that the Second Generation authors do wish to represent the Holocaust, although admittedly not through their own eyes. For some, they represent the Holocaust by writing their parents’ stories. Spiegelman, for example, represents the Holocaust by describing his parents’ experiences in Auschwitz. More generally, despite their lack of firsthand knowledge or experience they wrote just as intimately of the role of the Holocaust in their lives as their parents did. For them there was no “Before;” their whole lives only existed as they were because of their parents’ Holocaust experience.⁶¹ Just as the Holocaust became central to Jewish identity in the 1960s and 1970s, it remained so as these children of survivors began to find their voice and publish their stories. Through genocide and the attempt to destroy the Jewish people, a modern self-definition for Second Generation survivors was solidified and shaped.

⁵⁹ Melvin Jules Bukiet, *Nothing Makes You Free: Writings by Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 14.

⁶⁰ Grimwood, 3; author’s original emphasis included.

⁶¹ Bukiet, 13.

While their lives existed outside the Holocaust and they grew up in a time not affected by the Second World War, they still felt irrevocably drawn to the Holocaust and their parents' experiences. Eisenstein compares her obsession to the Holocaust to a drug addiction.⁶² These children of survivors felt compelled to learn everything they could about the Holocaust in order to gain knowledge and experience where they had none. They expressed a desire to learn the details of what their parents went through in the camps, but also there was the need to understand their own lives better. Prince writes, "Subjects indicated that their present motivation to ask their parents questions involved a desire to understand better their own identity through understanding the forces that had affected their parents and, indirectly, themselves."⁶³ In many ways, by asking their parents such questions and then recording them, these writers are interviewers more so than authors. Still, there is construction happening in the simple act of asking and recording. Spiegelman addresses this by recording the process of asking. The readers of *Maus* experience the author asking his father questions about his time in Auschwitz. This approach to writing is not merely a postmodern technique; it illustrates the ramifications of adaptation, which is what these children do when they take on their parents' experiences as their own. The Holocaust became the largest, most life-changing experience of their lives, despite their lack of direct knowledge. As such, these

⁶² Eisenstein, 20.

⁶³ Prince, 45.

children of survivors found themselves compelled to gather as much knowledge as they could—either through their parents’ accounts or their own research.

Some even stated that they wish they had been alive during the Holocaust, if only to be able to have their own stories of survival. While their current Holocaust connection is only secondhand, adopted through their connection to their parents, experiences of their own would solidify this connection and give reasoning behind their own sense of suffering. Pilcer writes, “I was in love with the war, memorized every detail, milking it for all its horror. I wanted to be there. My father’s Auschwitz, my mother’s Czestochowa. To burn in purifying fires.”⁶⁴ Imagining their own person in the place of their father or mother speaks to the kind of problems the Second Generation face as they begin to tap into their parents’ memories. According to Melvin Jules Bukiet, these children became victims of the Holocaust who had never been inside the barbed wire of an extermination or concentration camp.⁶⁵ They want to be victimized precisely as their parents were, not because they want to be victims, but because they want to understand familial history and thereby anchor their Jewish identity. That desire to understand a family’s specific past is not unique to Jewish Americans. The difference is that it happens that an entire people share one story, are a part of the same

⁶⁴ Pilcer, 80.

⁶⁵ Bukiet, 13.

familial history. These children of survivors are particularly important in revealing to the general public the significance of the Holocaust for future generations. The Holocaust is not a single generation's experience, isolated in the history of World War II and postwar America. Rather, it is an event that reverberates throughout the decades, and what was felt by the victims of the Holocaust was passed on to the children of those survivors as an inheritance. It is the way in which these children first write the stories of their parents and then adopt those stories as their own that transforms a historical event into a present-day issue.

These children of survivors have adopted this personal and collective identity of Holocaust survivors, officially linking their present to their parents' pasts. Lucy Y. Steinitz is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors. She obtained a master's degree in Contemporary Jewish Studies from Brandeis University in 1974 and continued on to work as an academic coordinator of Jewish Studies for both the City College of New York and the University of Chicago. She writes of a need to feel connected to the Holocaust and the sense that their lives have an even deeper meaning in a post-Holocaust world in the introduction of *Life after the Holocaust* when she says, "our common origin yields a collective identity."⁶⁶ This seemingly simple statement indicates precisely why the Second Generation literature is so

⁶⁶ Lucy Y. Steinitz, ed. *Living After the Holocaust* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1975), iii.

important to the construction of a national Jewish identity. Steinitz believes, as many do, that because they come from the same history, Jewish Americans are tied together in a way unique to other minority groups.

But how is the Second Generation different from other groups? Steinitz continues by arguing that, “we are not only the children of one or two people who survived the Holocaust, but the children of all their friends who survived, of those they didn’t know, and of the millions of victims who perished.”⁶⁷ This particular idea is a key difference. Steinitz argues that there is no distinction between families. Jewish Americans are not a group of people that happen to share a religion. Instead, they belong to one constructed family – a family with a common goal to commemorate those lost in the Holocaust while securing a future for Jewish Americans where their collective can come together. A result of this, Steinitz says, is that Jewish American lives “have been inculcated with a level of strength and deep meaning that contrasts sharply with the background of many American peers.”⁶⁸ This strength allows them to produce literature, but it is this belief that their experiences are different from many other Americans which necessitate an identity separate from the larger American public.

Children of survivors took on a new importance and they perceived their lives as a means to bear witness to this Holocaust legacy. They felt obligated to pass these stories on to

⁶⁷ Steinitz, iii.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

newer generations; they were not directly part of this legacy, but they still saw themselves as living it. S. Hanala Stadner writes of the same feeling that many adopt in the aftermath of genocide. The idea that in order to regroup their community and negate the actions of the perpetrators there is a need to remember: remember what happened, but also to remember life as it was before. She says, “as Jews, we must never forget.”⁶⁹ They took on the burden of becoming the bearers of the Holocaust. These children of survivors transformed themselves into survivors and felt the need to carry on their parents’ Holocaust stories. However, there were a number of internal struggles that came hand in hand with an identity based upon a tragic event of this magnitude that these Second Generation survivors had to face.

These children of survivors struggled to find a middle ground between honoring their parents’ survival and becoming stifled by the overwhelming sense of tragedy associated with the Holocaust. Pilcer recounts, “I looked at my parents. Their memories did not lead them to peace, only tearful retellings of loss. In fact, they did nothing but remember...when I wanted to go outside, she turned on me. ‘*Paskudnyak!* It’s the day I lost my whole family.’”⁷⁰ They felt this duty as a legacy that they were honored to tell to their children as it is a story of their family’s survival; however, it was a story of tragedy as well. Although their parents did

⁶⁹ Stadner, 74.

⁷⁰ Pilcer, 31.

survive, this survival was not an easy journey and many of their extended family members most likely did not.

Children of survivors were often conflicted about this burden of remembering. Eisenstein states that any traditionally joyous moments of her life was consistently undercut by this enormous sense of sadness that inevitably accompanied the Holocaust.⁷¹ Stadner echoes this feeling when she writes, “being a child of Holocaust survivors is an identity...while for some this is a positive identity, a sense of ‘specialness,’ others feel scarred by such a background.”⁷² These children of survivors searched for a balance between the positive lessons of their parents’ survival and the oppressive nature that comes along with genocide. They attempted to overcome the burden of their parents’ past, while at the same time provide a sense of hope for the future and an identity for subsequent generations.

Still, they were not quite sure how to accomplish this, and questioned if they would be able to communicate how the Holocaust has shaped their parents and their own lives as well. Bukiet wonders, “How do you cope when the most important events of your life occurred before you were born?”⁷³ They were conflicted about their role as tale-bearers. This legacy

⁷¹ Eisenstein, 24.

⁷² Stadner, 149.

⁷³ Bukiet, 18.

was one that stemmed from tragedy, so the question arose as to how these tales could be carried on as legacy if what was being transmitted was in fact a negative story. Art Spiegelman deals with this internal conflict many children of survivors face in his *Maus* series. Spiegelman was born in Stockholm in 1948 and immigrated with his parents, both Holocaust survivors who met prior to the Holocaust, to New York, where he grew up in Rego Park. After a brief four year period spent in San Francisco, Spiegelman has spent his life living in New York City. The first half of his comic *Maus* was published in 1986, the second in 1991, and it was with these works that Spiegelman himself found critical acclaim, both from those in the comic industry as well as Holocaust scholars.

In *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Begin*, Spiegelman recounts a conversation between himself and his wife concerning his father. He says, “I mean, I can’t even make any sense out of my relationship with my father...How am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz?...out of the Holocaust?”⁷⁴ Here Spiegelman is exposing his own insecurities as a translator of very personal, but also historical, issues. He questions his ability to interpret for both a larger more general audience and other Second Generation survivors as well. There was a sense of inadequacy, as they never experienced what their parents lived, and yet

⁷⁴ Art Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 16.

because of their parents they felt as though they must relay these stories to others. Acting as an intermediary between his father's personal account and a larger Holocaust discourse, Spiegelman and other Second Generation authors are attempting to both create a modern Jewish American identity and ensure their place within that identity.

The Holocaust saturated the environment in which these children grew up. According to Prince, these children of survivors were acutely aware of their parents' survivorship from an early age. Even without a vivid memory of their first experiences of their parents' stories, they state that they had always known of their parents' Holocaust lives.⁷⁵ Thane Rosenbaum was born in New York City in 1960, the only son of two Holocaust survivors. Later he and his family moved to Miami Beach, where he went on to gain his degrees from the University of Florida and the University of Miami. He gave up his profession as a Wall Street lawyer to begin writing and giving lectures on both the Holocaust and the ethics of the American legal system.⁷⁶ He has published several novels about Second Generation survivors and their struggles to come to terms with the Holocaust. In his novel *Second Hand Smoke*, his narrator Duncan Katz is a child of Holocaust survivors and would have inevitably shared the same key experiences that Rosenbaum encountered growing up within the realm of the Holocaust.

⁷⁵ Prince, 29.

⁷⁶ The Henry Walker Agency, Inc., "HWA Biography: Thane Rosenbaum," www.harrywalker.com/speakers (accessed September 16, 2008).

Rosenbaum creates a scene between Duncan and his estranged wife, where she tells him that “the environment of this house is polluted with smoke all the way from those German ovens...your parents did this to you, and the war did it to them.”⁷⁷ The Holocaust spread throughout their lives not through conscious, self-aware storytelling, but from the thousands of little ways the Holocaust shaped the way these parents raised their children. Through the random intermingling of stories that are brought up on a daily basis, forcing these children to piece together their parents’ Holocaust lives. Through their parents’ reactions and overreactions to everyday occurrences. At times their parents entered into a constant state of paranoia, looking for signs of the coming of the next Holocaust, planning escape routes, even attempting to predict how neighbors or they themselves would react placed into similar positions.

S. Hanala Stadner describes a scene where this sense of paranoia is evident. Stadner is showing her mother her new home in Los Angeles and her mother immediately reacts with relief. She is not impressed by the magnitude of the new home, but instead is calmed by the idea that if the Holocaust happened again there would places for her daughter to hide. She writes, “I show Ma the canyon from my bedroom balcony. Miles of forest going down to ocean. ‘Look, Ma. It’s national parklands, so nobody can build on it and ruin the view.’ Ma

⁷⁷ Rosenbaum, 85.

looks. ‘Dere’s a lot of places to hide. Da Germans would never find me here.’ Gulp. Poor Mummy. Fifty-five years later...the Holocaust—it keeps going and going and going...”⁷⁸ Some children even adopted this mentality in their own lives; they inherited their parents’ fear. Pilcer writes, “The Holocaust was mine alone to bear. That’s why they had to hear me. I’d show all these merchants what it meant to suffer, or to be so close to it that you got a dose.”⁷⁹ To Second Generation writers, the Holocaust became an almost inherent characteristic of the First Generation that seemed as though it had been genetically passed on to their children. The suffering of survivors became contagious—something that these children adopted as their own due to their proximity to genocide.

They began to question their neighbors. Would they hide them? Would they rescue them? Or would they turn their backs on them? They even began to question how they would have been able to react. Would they have been able to survive as their parents had? What would that survival cost them? “In my deepest, most involuntary place, my stomach, I carried the Holocaust. I had all the moves. I was born with the stealth, with the terrors.”⁸⁰ These children of survivors adopted the fear their parents learned from their Holocaust experiences. Many of these Second Generation authors wrote about their nightmares of

⁷⁸ Stadner, 340.

⁷⁹ Pilcer, 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

cattle cars or the smoke of the gas chambers. They imagined themselves in their parents' place during the Holocaust, or imagined themselves as another victim alongside their parents.⁸¹ They internalized the Holocaust so much so that their modern day fears and worries extend into their parents' past.

In *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* Spiegelman began the difficult task of collecting Vladek's, his father, stories. During one of the breaks in Vladek's story, where the narration is returned to the present-day, the two characters discuss the issue of money and how Vladek's new wife, Mala, spends money needlessly. Vladek says to Spiegelman "And it's for *you* I watch out my money!"⁸² This scene demonstrates that the actions of these parents are not just motivated by an irrational fear that the Holocaust will inevitably repeat itself. More importantly, it is motivated by the concern that if it were their children would they have been able to survive as well. This fear is motivated by a hope of a continuation of their children and their lives. Learning about the Holocaust in this manner both pulled these children close to their parents and further alienated them from each other. The closeness developed from a sense of understanding their parents as survivors and, ironically, the alienation too came from seeing their parents as abstract representations of this thing called

⁸¹ Prince, 43.

⁸² Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 67.

“The Holocaust,” an event these children never saw first-hand. Despite that, the personal attachment to their parents is strong.

Just as their connection to both America and to Eastern Europe creates a sense of displacement, they are equally disconnected from their parents because of their experiences, leading them to crave a sense of belonging to The Holocaust as a singular event in order to write themselves a part in their own personal family history. These children of survivors were caught between wanting to be a part of the new world, the new world America and what its culture represents, and the old world, which contains the secrets of the past still haunting the present. Many of these children find themselves drawn to the countries where their parents had previously lived. Survivors’ pre-Holocaust lives and their previous countries took on an idealized image for the Second Generation. Reconnecting with this past became a means in which to solidify their own connection to their own Jewish identity.

Pilcer describes a scene between herself and her parents where they discuss returning to Poland. “‘It’s not for you to go,’ she insisted. ‘You’re an American.’ ... ‘I need to know where we come from,’ I insisted. ‘Who we are. Who I am,’ I added softly.”⁸³ Even her mother sees her as isolated from the Holocaust; in her eyes her daughter is American and the Holocaust is not her experience. However, Pilcer—not unlike other children of survivors—

⁸³ Pilcer, 107.

feels that she must establish a more direct connection to her parents' pre-Holocaust lives in order to truly understand her own identity. She feels as though her parents' survival is her story as well. She craves the same kind of cathartic experience her parents seek in returning to Poland. Yet, oftentimes, the First Generation did not understand this compulsion of their children to connect to the most traumatic experience of their lives. Pilcer's father replies to the above situation when he states, "You don't know nothing about it...you should only thank God you weren't there!"⁸⁴ Despite their parents' reactions, these children of survivors wondered about what their lives would have been like if the Holocaust had not happened and their parents had remained in Europe. In Rosenbaum's novel *Second Hand Smoke*, Duncan Katz eventually takes a job as a sort of Nazi hunter, uncovering and prosecuting those involved in the Holocaust. The legacy of the Holocaust is carried on for Rosenbaum's narrator through adolescence and into adulthood. Later, once he learns of a secret brother living in Poland, Duncan travels there in effort to reconnect with his only remaining family and ultimately attempts to reconnect with his parents' pre-Holocaust lives.

Rosenbaum highlights this tension between wondering and living in his creation of the two brothers Duncan and Isaac. Isaac is the son that Mila left in Poland during the war and grew up where Duncan very well would have grown up had his mother not emigrated to

⁸⁴ Pilcer, 108.

America after the Holocaust. This physical split of the brothers demonstrates the psychological split that these children of survivors felt. They also felt that by physically seeing these places it may in a way solidify their parents' pre-Holocaust life, something that they have no recollection of and therefore struggled to understand, especially since the Holocaust became such a dominant force in their own lives. When speaking to Mila, a friend tells her, ““Your sons never had no chance to know their real mother—the person you would have been if there was no Auschwitz.””⁸⁵ Returning to where their parents had been, where their lives had ended and they were forced to start new, brought these children of survivors more of a sense of connectedness to their parents, to how they lived, and how they survived.

⁸⁵ Rosenbaum, 206.

CHAPTER THREE:
LIVING MEMORIALS, COMING TO TERMS WITH THE HOLOCAUST

*We know about the Holocaust intellectually—through books and films among other things—but we also “have” the “Holocaust” in our nerves a little—through our parents.*⁸⁶

Throughout the literature of the Second Generation the theme of remembrance, of their lives becoming a means to remember those who died, occurs repeatedly. These children of survivors became a form of living memorials in a variety of ways. Historian James E. Young writes that “memory is never shaped in a vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure. Both the reasons given for Holocaust memorials and the kinds of memory they generate are as various as the sites themselves.”⁸⁷ A number of these monuments or memorials are created as a means to educate future generations to the meaning of the Holocaust—albeit often inculcated with a nationalistic or religious agenda. However, the birth of these children of survivors often takes on the same meaning behind these memorials. They are themselves a living memorial—a tribute to the past and those who died and at the same time a physical manifestation of the promise of the future. They are further proof of their parents’ survival

⁸⁶ David M. Szonyi, “Five Children of Survivors: a Conversation,” 51.

⁸⁷ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

but also a physical manifestation for those relatives who did not survive. Often the lives of the Second Generation took on a weighted significance for their parents. Pilcer writes of a conversation between herself and her mother, where she asks “‘Did you ever think not to bring children into such a world?’ ‘Never,’ she answered. ‘They killed us, not our seed.’ Then she looked at me. ‘You were our greatest pleasure.’”⁸⁸ Pilcer’s mother and other survivors began to look at their children beyond a normal parent’s view of their newborn child. In an effort to further prove their own existence, their own ability to live beyond the suffering of the Holocaust, these survivors looked to their children as evidence that they could in fact live on in a post-Holocaust world. These children were now for their parents a continuation of the Jewish people, after a period when the fate of this community had been unsure. These children of survivors were evidence of both their own parents’ personal survival, but also the survival of the Jewish people as a whole. After the death and destruction of the Holocaust, these survivors entered into their new lives with the intent of carrying forth and creating new lives.

While there was the same desire of a better life for subsequent generations that accompanies many other immigrant stories, these survivors felt that their children were a literal and symbolic rebirth. The lives of the Second Generation became much more than just

⁸⁸ Pilcer, 112.

an opportunity for a better future. They were a reawakening of their parents and a new chapter in Jewish history—one that very well may never have existed. Yet, this weight that fell upon the shoulders of the Second Generation is both an honor, as they were given a venerable place within this new American post-Holocaust Jewish community, and a burden, as these expectations were nearly impossible to fulfill. Rosenbaum writes of his narrator, Duncan, that “the pained history of Jewish suffering and exile had been answered with just one accidental, regrettable birth.”⁸⁹ The word “regrettable” shows Duncan’s uneasiness with the heightened significance placed upon his birth, with his position within his family, and with his connection to the Holocaust. Growing up within this Holocaust environment, Duncan is all too aware of how his parents view his life, and as such becomes uneasy. However, the parents of Duncan and other children of survivors viewed their children as the summation of and a turning point to years of Jewish pain. They were a physical representation of their parents’ survival and even further a negation of the Holocaust.

There was no unified sense of Jewish identity left in the aftermath of the Holocaust for those survivors immigrating to America and any semblance of a previous collective self-definition had been destroyed. Therefore, the parents of the Second Generation turned to their children as a means to solidify their own existence within the uncertainty left in the

⁸⁹ Rosenbaum, 36.

aftermath of the Holocaust. The transcript of a conversation between five children of survivors (Meyer Goldstein, Anita Norich, Dina Rosenfeld, Lucy Steinitz, and David Szonyi) provides personal insight into this sense of rebirth and renewal that America and these children provided for their parents. “*Dina*: After my brothers and sisters were killed, I was the new beginning. They were going to forget all the pain, the past, and start anew...*David*: They looked upon America as a new start...*Anita*: There’s a sense that each new child is in fact a real new beginning.”⁹⁰ Jewish survivors soon found themselves completely disconnected from their previous lives, their previous relationships, their previous countries. Holocaust survivors saw their children as a means with which to reestablish the connections that they had lost during the Holocaust

The First Generation most likely ended up placed within any number of Displaced Persons camps, surrounded by the unfamiliar, with little in common with their newfound neighbors than a shared traumatic experience, and with a new goal of creating a new life most likely in a new country. The Jewish community as a whole entered into these new lives fragmented, searching for a new identity and a new way to connect to one another. These children of survivors are, therefore, both evidence of their parents’ survival and a means by which to memorialize their previous lives, or their previous relatives. Their parents have instilled the lives of these children with an unrealistic sense of hope and restoration.

⁹⁰ “Five Children of Survivors: A Conversation” 36, 39.

Inevitably these children will begin to see themselves as failures or even begin to resent their parents should the Second Generation feel that they are not in fact living up to these expectations.

In this chaotic and disjointed environment the birth of a new generation clearly takes on a new significance. After being faced with nothing but death and the struggle for survival in the harshest of conditions, the birth of the Second Generation becomes weighted with meaning. Bukiet writes that these children of survivors were seen by their parents as “miracles in the flesh...a retroactive victory over tyranny and genocide.”⁹¹ They become a reversal of the Holocaust, birth in the place of death, and even further they are proof of their parents’ abilities to survive. Their parents felt as though their birth was a negation of the Holocaust and the attempt to destroy the Jewish people: instead of the destruction of genocide there was a new beginning and the possibility of a brighter future for not just their individual families but also for the Jewish community as a whole.

Steinitz echoes this idea when she writes, “We, the children of survivors, represent a reversal of the daily death.”⁹² Survivors of the Holocaust saw the Second Generation as a reversal of the death and destruction of genocide. From the start the identities of the Second

⁹¹ Bukiet, 14.

⁹² Steinitz, iii.

Generation, even within their own families, are predicated upon the Holocaust and what their lives came to represent. It would seem almost impossible to separate the Holocaust from this new identity as Jews in America since these following generations have no pre-Holocaust life; they lived their entire lives within the aftermath of genocide, forever impacted and forever marked. For them, the Holocaust is now what defines what it means to be Jewish in America today.

The Second Generation began to take on their parents' Holocaust experiences as though they were their own. This adoption was fostered by both these children of survivors and their parents as well. Many survivors began to look at their children as a symbol of their own survival. In *Second Hand Smoke*, Rosenbaum creates a scene between mother and son, Mila and Duncan, when he writes “‘Instead, we invest in you,’ Mila said, her eyes burning a scar right onto the soul of her son. ‘You must avenge our deaths.’”⁹³ Mila, like a number of other survivors, viewed her son's life as a sort of retroactive reversal of the Holocaust. The language used to describe her statement to her son reflects a permanent marking of his identity as Mila's avenger. Like her tattoo, marking her survivor status in Auschwitz, Mila transfers this mark metaphorically onto her son.

⁹³ Rosenbaum, 32.

His birth was the negation of what she calls her death. Even though she and her husband survived, she refers to their death, the death of their pre-Holocaust lives. Duncan became the justification for Mila's survival. Duncan again says, "My life is one big atonement. Everything is Kaddish."⁹⁴ Kaddish, the Jewish rites of mourning, became a part of Duncan himself. His life was a physical embodiment of remembering the dead. It is in moments such as these that the connection between the Jewish identity of these children of survivors and the Holocaust is most evident. If their lives were a direct representation of their parents' survival, then their self-definition is not complete without the Holocaust. Their identity is predicated upon their parents' Holocaust experiences.

Some of the Second Generation were even named after dead relatives, a means in which to recognize and honor those who died during the Holocaust. Frequently, these children of survivors were believed to be a new physical embodiment of those who passed. Author and son of two Holocaust survivors, Alan L. Berger, refers to this as a continual "presence of an absence."⁹⁵ These children of survivors grew up with a hyperawareness of the lack of relatives and as such the adoption of their relatives' names at times means even more than they. Neuhaus writes in his letter to his ancestors, "As a second-generation Holocaust

⁹⁴ Rosenbaum, 263.

⁹⁵ Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (New York: State University of New York, 1997), 61.

survivor, I am both a receptacle for and a conveyor of the undying memory. It is an extraordinary assignment. I assume it, most of the time anxiously, because I am, after all, who you might have been.”⁹⁶ Neuhaus speaks to how these children of survivors became a representation of those who died. But for chance, these Holocaust victims could have lived the life of his mother or his father. This awareness of the heightened meaning behind the lives of these children of survivors places an emphasis on the names of the Second Generation. Rosenbaum writes that there was an “obsession with names...their names [those who died during the Holocaust] could be reclaimed.”⁹⁷ Naming their children after deceased relatives became a means to remember and honor those that died.

However, this at times made these children of survivors overly conscious of their own lives and their own actions. Stadner deals with this struggle when she describes a scene where she consciously abandons her Americanized nickname of Suzie and decides to be called Hanala instead. “As I jog along in the fancy-schmancy Sports Club L.A., in my \$135 Nikes...I compare my life to Hanala’s—the woman who stripped, walked into a gas chamber...I decide I will honor her life. Hanala’s bigger-than-life life. Her pre-Hitler life.

⁹⁶ Neuhaus, 172.

⁹⁷ Rosenbaum, 5.

I'm changing my name back to Hanala."⁹⁸ After a struggle with addiction, Stadner began to reevaluate her life, comparing it to that of her namesake. Eisenstein was named after her father's two sisters who died during the Holocaust. She writes, "I could not read his expression at the time, but as my father found his way back to his family through me, I felt that moment's tender fusing of pleasure and loss."⁹⁹ Her father is able to once again connect to the family he had lost through his daughter and his relationship with her. For her father, she was transformed into a living memorial of his sisters. These children of survivors became a mixture of joy and sorrow, of loss and rebirth.

They were representations of the future, of both their own family and the Jewish community, but they were also a means through which to remember those of the past. Pilcer summarizes the struggle that many of these children have with this idea of memorialization when she writes, "*Remember the dead*. But I had never known any of them."¹⁰⁰ These children of survivors began to question how they could possibly embody, remember, or honor those they are named after when they themselves know nothing about them or how they lived. Their lives are so far removed from what these children of survivors know. A number of

⁹⁸ Stadner, 344.

⁹⁹ Eisenstein, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Pilcer, 46.

inherent contradictions began to arise that further confused the Second Generation's search for identity. They were told stories of their deceased relatives, mostly through the telling and retelling of their parents' own Holocaust stories. These children of survivors were constantly told to honor their family, to carry forth their memory, to always remember—or at least to never forget; yet, they never knew those whom they were intended to memorialize.

At times these Second Generation authors make their connection to the Holocaust even more intimate through the retelling of their parents' stories, as if they were their own to tell. Often these Second Generation writers will tell these stories as though they themselves were living them, or as though they are the narrator telling their own story. Spiegelman does exactly that in *Maus: a Survivor's Tale*. Written in the first person, the narration weaves from the present to the past, with present-day Spiegelman discussing the family's personal history of the Holocaust with his father. Later, when the father is telling the story, the narration continues in first person, with Spiegelman adopting the voice and story of his father as his own. As the story transitions between present-day and the Holocaust, the reader is left feeling that this is both Art's story and his father's.

Grimwood discusses the blurred narration between Vladek and Spiegelman when she writes, "Artie has an insistent and pervasive preoccupation with recording his father's story,

which is dangerously close to becoming the master narrative of his own life.”¹⁰¹ While the lines between the survivors and their children are blurred even within the dialogue of their literature, *Maus* is still defined as Spiegelman’s autobiography and not Vladek’s biography. Ultimately this is Spiegelman’s story of his identity and his place within the Holocaust. The lines between the survivors and their children are blurred even within the dialogue of their literature. Pilcer even uses her mother’s maiden name as a pseudonym when writing. She adopts her mother’s pre-Holocaust name, and internally draws herself closer to understanding her mother’s pre-Holocaust life.¹⁰² The children of survivors are redefining what a Holocaust survivor is through their struggles to define what it means to be Jewish in America. They have appropriated their parents’ experiences in order to connect their own lives directly to both their parents’ lives and to a larger Jewish community as a whole.

The first-person perspective of First Generation Holocaust survivors through the eyes of the Second Generation can be seen again in *Ghosts of the Holocaust*, an anthology of poetry compiled completely from Second Generation writers. The thorough imagery depicted within the lines signifies the clarity in which the survivors still feel the wounds of the past. In the poem “Real Chocolate,” the difference between the Second Generation author and the

¹⁰¹ Grimwood, 78.

¹⁰² Pilcer, 12.

Holocaust narrator is blatantly evident, as the point of view is a woman and the author is male. Still, the author is able to capture the voice of the female victim with the same intensity as if the event happened yesterday to him. Stewart Florsheim, the author, writes the first stanza, “They lured me out of the barracks/ with promises of chocolate/ and words like ‘Schatzchen,’/ but the other women knew,/ and called me a soldier’s whore/ even before they heard the noises outside./ I knew as well,/ but hunger has a way of changing you,/ of causing you to forget who you are.”¹⁰³ Eisenstein even describes dressing as her father, crossing gender boundaries to further her connection to her father and his Holocaust experiences.¹⁰⁴ The distinction between the author and the narrator of not only gender but also decades and experiences illustrates just how deep the wounds of the Holocaust run and how the impact prevails despite any differences between the victims and their children.

In *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* Spiegelman starts the second chapter, “Auschwitz (Time Flies),” with a series of panels depicting himself sitting at his desk. He says, “Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944...I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987. In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby...Between May 16, 1944 and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews

¹⁰³ Stewart J. Florsheim, “Real Chocolate,” in *Ghosts of the Holocaust*, ed. Stewart J. Florsheim (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 30.

¹⁰⁴ Eisenstein, 29.

were gassed in Auschwitz.”¹⁰⁵ Here Spiegelman is furthering the connection between his present and his father’s past. He weaves together facts from the Holocaust with information about his present, comparing his own life with his father’s Holocaust story. In the final panel of the page the scope of the drawing is pulled out, giving the reader the full view of Spiegelman and the room. The viewer sees Spiegelman and his desk are located on top of a pile of nude bodies. Spiegelman’s present is situated directly on top of the Holocaust and its victims. Outside the window a guard tower and a fence of barbed wire is evident as well.

Even when drawing scenes to depict his own adult life, Spiegelman incorporates Holocaust imagery, furthering his own connection to the genocide. The Holocaust literally surrounds him while he works on his drawings. He talks of the various offers being made to turn his graphic novel into a movie or television program. However, he ends this statement with “(I don’t wanna.) In May 1968 my mother killed herself, (she left no note.) Lately I’ve been feeling depressed.”¹⁰⁶ Spiegelman is overwhelmed by the Holocaust and its current position in his life. He lays his head on his desk and wraps his arms around his body, physically pulling himself inward as the Holocaust, through the bodies underneath him and the camp outside his window, begin to take over.

¹⁰⁵ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 41.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

This imagery continues on the following page with another series of panels.

Spiegelman is no longer alone in his room; two American reporters and one German reporter can be seen now asking him questions.¹⁰⁷ Why should these same feelings not hold true for the children of perpetrators as well? After a barrage of questions and interruptions by the reporters, Spiegelman's drawings of himself have slowly shrunk to depict himself as a child crying for his mother. Spiegelman leaves the room walking down the street to an appointment with Pavel, his "shrink."¹⁰⁸ As the panels continue the bodies from the room continue down the street as if they are following Spiegelman. The imagery of a childlike Spiegelman walking amidst the corpses gives the reader the sense of the pervasiveness of the Holocaust in his life, from childhood into adulthood. After his discussion with Pavel, he is seen walking down this same street again. This time Spiegelman slowly grows back into an adult and the bodies are no longer strewn about the sidewalk. His time spent openly discussing his work and the Holocaust, has allowed for his present to stabilize itself.

Recently the Holocaust Museum in Houston has established a program where four children of Holocaust survivors travel the local area and give presentations of their parents' Holocaust stories. Sandy Lessig, a member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and

¹⁰⁷ The reporters, like Spiegelman, are wearing corresponding animal masks that Spiegelman uses throughout *Maus* to identify his characters.

¹⁰⁸ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 43.

one of the museum's trained presenters, weaves her own words with a recorded interview and account of her father.¹⁰⁹ Lessig and other children of survivors are now stepping into roles that traditionally have fallen to their parents. They are now the attestors to the Holocaust for American society. Their parents' Holocaust experiences are now the stories of their children. Rather than the firsthand narrative of the survivors themselves, the Second Generation is now adopting their parents' Holocaust stories and relaying them to modern audiences.

Many Second Generation authors write of a physical transference of their parents' Holocaust experiences, or even of their parents, into their own bodies. Pilcer writes, "I was a medium, Houdini of the Holocaust, which transmitted itself through me, the uncut umbilical cord of my mother feeding me blood images vivid as they were terrifying. Spirits of the dead cried out of me."¹¹⁰ Redel writes, "Our skin was our mother's skin, traversed, foreign, each of us girls a country she crept through to come to bring us forth."¹¹¹ She implants her mother's body into her and her siblings' bodies. She describes an almost physical absorption of her mother into herself. However, she also describes a physical absorption of her mother's

¹⁰⁹ Claudia Feldman, "Holocaust survivors' children take up parents' stories," *Houston Chronicle* 20 April 2009. www.chron.com (accessed April 22, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Pilcer, 77.

¹¹¹ Redel, 69.

past. Each step of her mother's Holocaust journey and her immigration to America is described as a physical manifestation within her daughters. Their skin becomes a map of their mother and the Holocaust. Moshe Yungman writes, "Now I lie on the altar,/ my father inside me,/ my grandfather inside me."¹¹² Like Redel, Yungman describes a physical transference of his ancestors into himself. These lines are not just a way in which to memorialize his father's, and his grandfather's Holocaust experiences; they are also describing Yungman's process of internalizing his forefathers—their experience, memories, and the Holocaust.

At the First International Conference of Children of Holocaust Survivors, Elie Wiesel summarized these responses when he told these children that, "Yours is a privileged generation: you remember things that you have not lived; but you remember them so well, so profoundly, that every one of your words, every one of your stories, every one of your silences comes to bear on our own. You are our justification."¹¹³

¹¹² Moshe Yungman, "The Sacrifice," in *Living After the Holocaust*, 64.

¹¹³ Elie Wiesel, *First International Conference of Children of Holocaust Survivors*.

CHAPTER FOUR:
**TRANSFERENCE OF SURVIVOR’S GUILT, A CONTINUATION OF THE
HOLOCAUST**

*I grew up a mere mortal in a world of martyrs, who had suffered, heroes who had survived,
and saints who had given.*¹¹⁴

In sharp contrast to the sense of the Second Generation as living memorials, these secondhand survivors often felt as though they would never live up to the experiences of their parents. At times, these children of survivors bear the same sense of survivor’s guilt as their parents and other survivors did, and yet at the same time they feel as though these feelings are not legitimate because they have not suffered in the same way that their parents have. They are not “real” survivors. Stadner writes, “I’m filled with a fury that no one, including myself, can understand. After all, I hadn’t been in Poland. I was born here in Montreal, yet I want to reach out and torture someone.”¹¹⁵ This feeling of illegitimacy often leads to feelings of anger for these children of survivors. Stadner and other members of the Second Generation at times felt as though their reactions to the Holocaust and their parents’ trauma

¹¹⁴ Mostysser, 7.

¹¹⁵ Stadner, 43; author’s original emphasis.

were not valid. Mostysher summarizes this feeling of illegitimacy best when she writes, “And I knew for myself that any horrors of my own, any loneliness, or want, or frustration, paled before what my parents had suffered. And any victory of my own paled before what they had achieved.”¹¹⁶ She, like so many others, carries a sense of inadequacy, where anything that happens in her life loses its significance in the face of the Holocaust. Holocaust guilt consumes their lives even though they did not live through it. The tragedy of the Holocaust outweighs any tragedy, and any success is overshadowed by the fact that her parents had achieved the ultimate success; they had survived in the face of the Holocaust. Rosenbaum’s Duncan “was special, not because of anything he had done, but because of the bleak lessons his parents had learned.”¹¹⁷ Their identity is predicated upon their parents’ survival, and as such they were left conflicted as to their own place within their Jewish identity. They are left with an impregnable guilt for what their parents have experienced, and the fact that they have not had to prove themselves in the same way that their parents have.

Their parents even helped to further this idea of inadequacy as many at times saw their children’s lives as trivial compared to what they endured during the Holocaust. Duncan

¹¹⁶ Mostysher, 6.

¹¹⁷ Rosenbaum, 21.

“may have been born into the family, but he was never accepted into its inner circle.”¹¹⁸

Even within his own family, Duncan is an outsider. He does not share the same experiences as his parents, yet these events have shaped his childhood, his identity, and his relationships, nearly his entire life. Spiegelman’s father throughout *Maus* sees him as a bit naïve, in need of Vladek’s assistance to understand how the world really is. According to Vladek, Auschwitz is what forces a child to grow up. Spiegelman never had to experience that and therefore cannot possibly fully understand the cruelty of humans and the way the world really is. Spiegelman must therefore give more weight to his father’s experiences. At the beginning of *Maus I* a ten-year-old Artie is seen crying to his father about his friends. Vladek replies, ““Friends? Your friends?...If you lock them together with no food for a week... THEN you could see what it is, friends!””¹¹⁹ If Spiegelman had himself been in Auschwitz it would give more weight to his experiences. At one point Spiegelman wishes he had in fact been there just so he could have experienced what his parents went through and because he felt guilty for having had an easier life.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Rosenbaum, 8.

¹¹⁹ Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, 6; author’s original emphasis.

¹²⁰ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 16.

Stadner reflects this same Holocaust inadequacy in her writing. Her mother consistently sees her as not living up to what her mother has sacrificed for. Stadner describes a conversation between herself and her mother when she writes, ““Hitler killed my brodders, my sisters, and all dere children, but I should live to have a daughter like you? You can’t use a plate?!’ She wants me neater?”¹²¹ Her mother feels as though Stadner has become spoiled growing up in a post-Holocaust environment. Stadner never faced the atrocities or hardships that had at one point consumed her mother’s life. In her mother’s eyes, Stadner is therefore too soft, an attribute that would have ultimately led to Stadner’s suffering had she been in her mother’s position; any experiences outside of the Holocaust can never measure up to what the First Generation encountered.¹²² Often these parents saw their children as spoiled by their upbringing outside of the suffering of the Holocaust. Mostysser writes, “Sometimes my mother would throw up her hands in despair and say, ‘American children don’t understand anything,’ and, of course, she was right, considering what she meant by anything.”¹²³ Underlying this frustration was the fact that the parents of the Second Generation thought their children could not possibly comprehend the Holocaust, and therefore could not

¹²¹ Stadner, 8; author’s original emphasis.

¹²² Ibid., 49.

¹²³ Steinitz, 9.

comprehend the reality of the world in which Jews lived. The effect upon these children of survivors was to leave them in a grey zone of identity, where they felt their connection to the Holocaust deeply, yet they also felt as though this connection could never be fully legitimized as they never lived through it themselves.

Their parents did not see their children as fully capable of dealing with everyday life because the Second Generation never had to endure the hardships the First Generation lived through. When speaking to his wife about his father Spiegelman says, “He loved showing off how **handy** he was...and proving that anything **I** did was all wrong.”¹²⁴ Vladek is therefore more capable due to his Holocaust experiences. In comparison, Spiegelman is somehow lesser, less able, and constantly in need of proving himself. Stadner writes, “Ma, nothing could compare to what you and Daddy went through, but sometimes something hurts us when we’re little...You don’t have to have a bullet in you to feel pain.”¹²⁵ These children of survivors struggle to find their own position in the aftermath of the Holocaust. While this relationship must inevitably be mediated through their parents as their connection is secondhand, they strive to move away from their parents as they feel they will never measure up to their parents’ suffering.

¹²⁴ Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, 97; author’s original emphasis.

¹²⁵ Stadner, 317.

These Holocaust children grew up in angst, much like the rest of the teenagers in America, but for very different reasons. The interactions between children and their parents are transformed by the Holocaust. These stories of the Second Generation often depict these children as they struggle to balance life with a controlling parent and life with a Holocaust survivor. Stadner writes of a discussion between her and her mother, ““Did your family die in da gas chambers?’ Yes, technically. And the ones still alive are in no state to raise children.”¹²⁶ The normalcy that is taken for granted within the typical parent-child relationship is a far cry from the relationship between survivors and the Second Generation. Pilcer demonstrates this struggle of relationships between herself and her parents after genocide when she writes of a conversation between her and her mother, “My voice was becoming ugly, the one I hated. After all the resolutions: *What she went through, how she suffered. I could never have survived. I mustn’t make my mother suffer more.*”¹²⁷ That thought—putting herself in place of her parents—has very specific psychological implications for any child of a Holocaust survivor. In a sense, it almost puts the child in competition with the parent, wondering who could have lasted the longest. Ultimately, the child loses, which complicates further the Second Generation’s sense of guilt.

¹²⁶ Stadner, 35.

¹²⁷ Pilcer, 11.

Children of survivors felt inadequate and, furthermore, their parents become models of the perfect Jews—self-sacrificing for an entire race, both past, present, and future generations. Steinitz writes, “The young children of Holocaust survivors often saw their parents as heroes rather than ordinary people. They saw their parents’ survival as a feat they could never accomplish.”¹²⁸ Their parents proved their ability to survive through genocide, while their children have grown up with only stories and imagination, wondering if they themselves would have had the strength, will, and determination that their parents exhibited. Spiegelman writes, “No matter what I accomplish, it doesn’t seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz.”¹²⁹ They begin to adopt a mentality where their lives, with their own trials and problems, pale in comparison to those of their parents. Stadner describes this as a “‘Never mind, it’s not important’ policy.”¹³⁰ They feel inadequate. Steinitz again writes, “they had proven their stamina, their bravery, their heroism; I had not, could not, do the same.”¹³¹ Her experiences, her life, does not compare with that of her parents. They have proven their strength and their will to survive; they have real and firm Holocaust experiences.

¹²⁸ Steinitz, 150.

¹²⁹ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 44.

¹³⁰ Stadner, 10.

¹³¹ Steinitz, iv.

Stadner does not. She is left with her own imagination, wondering if she would have been able to do what her parents had. She is left straddling this ambiguous middle-ground where she is a Holocaust survivor in that she has lived with its implications her whole life, but not a survivor in that she never saw the inside of a camp.

Spiegelman carries this sense of not being able to measure up to those who experienced the Holocaust directly through his exploration of his relationship to his brother, Richieu. Richieu was the child born to Vladek and Anja before the war, who was poisoned by his caregiver before being taken to a camp. Spiegelman examines the sense of sibling rivalry that he felt growing up, despite the fact that he never knew his brother. In a conversation with his wife, Spiegelman says, “The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble...it was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn’t compete.”¹³² Richieu is the child that never upsets their parents, never causes problems. Instead, due to his death at such a young age, he becomes an idealized image for Vladek and Anja. He becomes isolated in time, forever the young child that his parents lost during the genocide. He will never worry, as Spiegelman will, about how their parents’ traumatic experiences will affect

¹³² Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, 15; author’s original emphasis included.

his life. He will never face the same problems with his parents that Spiegelman does, and as such will never fight with their parents.

Also, for Spiegelman, his brother, who had lived during the Holocaust, would have been able to connect and interact with their parents in a way in which Spiegelman will never be able. Richieu would have been the child of Holocaust survivors who could claim a legitimate place within this post-Holocaust Jewish community; he had lived it as well. He would have had his own stories. His own connection to the Holocaust would not have depended upon Vladek or Anja. There is a scene in *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* where Vladek is recounting a conversation between himself and Anja's family over dinner. In the background, Spiegelman has drawn his brother spilling food on the table, being reprimanded by Anja, and then, in one of the final panels, crying.¹³³ This can be seen as a way for Spiegelman to draw his brother as any other normal toddler of his age—complete with tantrums and flaws of his own. These panels counteract the image of Richieu that Spiegelman grew up with. He is not this mythical idea of the perfect sibling, who never upset his parents the way Spiegelman did. Rather, Richieu is not unlike how Spiegelman himself could have been at that age.

¹³³ Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, 75.

Deepening the sense of guilt that these children of survivors felt are their feelings of shame and regret for having upset their parents. Stadner echoes this sentiment of not being able to become angry with someone who has undergone the trauma of the Holocaust. She writes about her childhood, “Oooh, I just hate Ma! But I *can* ’t hate her, she’s a Holocaust survivor. I must be very bad to be mad at a *Holocaust* survivor.”¹³⁴ They feel guilty for normal reactions of anger or irritation that other teenagers feel without question or without consequence. There is no room in the aftermath of the Holocaust for normalcy. Pilcer describes a scene where her father and she were arguing over the way she was dressed one night in her teenage years. Her father shouted, “‘I survived for this? To see my own daughter turn into filth? I should have died in the camps’ ... ’What do you have to cry about?’ he mocked. ‘I never had nothing, not even before the war.’ He handed me two dollars.”¹³⁵ Even everyday arguments take on a heightened context; everything is overshadowed by the Holocaust and the survivors take on an idealized role within this context. Like Pilcer and Stadner, these children of survivors recognize that survivors are given an almost saint-like status both within the Jewish community and within American society as a whole. They have survived the unfathomable and therefore are unquestionably righteous.

¹³⁴ Stadner, 37; author’s original emphasis included.

¹³⁵ Pilcer, 34.

For the Second Generation, because of the Holocaust, these seemingly normal adolescent feelings are accompanied by immediate guilt and regret for making their parents' lives more difficult, or becoming angry with those who have lived through these traumatic experiences. Bukiet writes, "Compared to them, what did you have to complain about?"¹³⁶ How can these children rebel against Holocaust survivors, after their years of torment, destruction, and death? Prince quotes a statement by Mr. E, a member of his psychological case study, when he writes, "I really didn't realize what they went through, and maybe a lot of the time I thought I should be nicer, maybe a little more understanding, maybe not as selfish. At times, I think I was."¹³⁷ Mr. E is aware of an implicit need to reverse the traditional roles between parents and their children. These children of survivors are essentially transformed into the caretakers of their parents in this sense. Instead of the normal rebellion of their American counterparts, these children of survivors are constantly aware and protective of their parents' mental state. They must in turn monitor their own actions so as not to upset their parents.

¹³⁶ Bukiet, 14.

¹³⁷ Prince, 41.

Prince goes on to state that a number of his subjects cited feelings of anger towards their parents.¹³⁸ However, these children were careful to keep these feelings to themselves. The Holocaust created an environment where the Second Generation felt that sharing their emotions would only further perpetuate their parents' suffering. Their parents' survival altered the ways in which these children were able to interact with them. This creates a dichotomy that is even further confusing for these children of survivors. Their parents are strong in the sense that they were able to survive, and yet they are still too weak to be pushed. There is a fine line that these children of survivors must walk in order to interact with their survivor parents. The Second Generation must not upset their parents; yet, their parents are an idealized image of Jewish strength through their ability to survive—an image that these children feel they themselves may never equal or attain.

Enid Dame grew up in Brooklyn, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors. She writes a poem that echoes this sentiment. “Later, we/ drank tea in glasses/ and seltzer water/ and felt inadequate...In a world/ of survivors/ is any gesture/ adequate?”¹³⁹ These children of survivors question their ability to say anything about the Holocaust. If they have not lived it as their parents have, if their experiences or their words will never mean as much as their parents, then does anything they do matter? Stadner writes, “Ma and Pa Holocaust... God

¹³⁸ Prince, 42.

¹³⁹ Enid Dame, “Diaspora 4,” in *Life After the Holocaust*, 57.

forbid anyone in the house should say, 'I'm sad' or 'I'm scared' or 'I'm hurt.' How do you share a feeling you're not supposed to have?"¹⁴⁰ Stadner, as well as other children of survivors, are left with no room to express these feelings to their parents. They are constantly aware of how their parents will react and what they had undergone during the Holocaust. As such, the Second Generation consistently questions their right to own or express certain emotions. Their parents had earned the ability to feel sad, scared, and hurt through their years during the Holocaust. However, their children had not; their only link to the Holocaust is through their parents.

Spiegelman's office scene at the beginning of his second chapter in *Maus II: My Father Bleeds History* carries a number of these Second Generation feelings of guilt and inadequacy. When asked why Germans today should feel guilty for events that happened before any of them were even born, Spiegelman responds, "Who am I to say?...But a lot of the corporations that flourished in Nazi Germany are richer than ever. I dunno...maybe EVERYONE has to feel guilty. EVERYONE! FOREVER!"¹⁴¹ He begins with a sense of uncertainty. He is again uncomfortable with his position as a translator for all things Holocaust, a duty that Second Generation survivors often take unto themselves. However, he

¹⁴⁰ Stadner, 4.

¹⁴¹ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 42; author's original emphasis included.

quickly shifts his opinion, concluding instead that everyone should feel guilty. He still carries the Holocaust with him. It has impacted his whole life. Why should these same feelings of guilt not carry over with the children of perpetrators as well? Why should EVERYONE not feel this same suppressed guilt? Spiegelman voices the sentiment that this sense of guilt has consumed his and other Second Generation authors' childhoods and therefore should be present among others.

Spiegelman continues the scene and this exploration of his present when he states, "Sometimes I just don't feel like a functioning adult."¹⁴² Spiegelman feels that he cannot cope with the Holocaust as an adult, as a whole person. The child-size Spiegelman is seen crawling down from his chair, further emphasizing his size, and saying "My father's ghost still hangs over me." Even after the death of his father, his impact still weighs heavily on Spiegelman. He questions his ability to be a father himself after the experiences he had growing up in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The Holocaust has overwhelmed Spiegelman to the point where he no longer feels as though he is an adult. He reverts back to childhood, both mentally and physically within his drawing.

During his visit with Pavel, Spiegelman continues a discussion of his feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and anger associated with his relationship to his father. Spiegelman says,

¹⁴² Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 43.

“Mainly I remember ARGUING with him...and being told that I couldn’t do anything as well as he could.”¹⁴³ Instead of the relationships between father and son that Pavel describes, those where the son is idolizing his father and looking up to him, Spiegelman remembers the tension that undercut his interactions with his father. As he leaves his session with Pavel and walks back to his office Spiegelman is seen as growing taller, back in to his adult-form. However, in the final panels of this scene he is sitting at his desk listening to an audio tape of his interviews with his father. After repeated attempts by Spiegelman to get Vladek to continue their discussion of his time at Auschwitz, Spiegelman blows up at his father. He screams, “**ENOUGH!** Tell me about Auschwitz!”¹⁴⁴ After this Spiegelman is again the child-size version of himself. Listening to his feelings of anger towards his father, Spiegelman has reverted back to his childhood, to his feelings of resentment and then subsequent guilt for becoming angry at a man who had to endure so much during the Holocaust.

Pilcer writes of how the Holocaust often defines and shapes their relationship with their parents: “In unaccented, well-reasoned English, we speak of anger, guilt, trying to separate ourselves from our parents and their Holocaust past. Secretly, we believe that

¹⁴³ Spiegelman, *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, 44; author’s original emphasis included.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 47; author’s original emphasis included.

nothing we can ever do will be as important as our parents' suffering."¹⁴⁵ These children of survivors began to question their identity in the face of their parents' Holocaust experiences. Their rights to normal feelings of anger, sadness, or even suffering took on a new light in the face of the Holocaust. They doubt their right to a number of reactions and feelings compared to the trauma their parents faced. Prince writes, "They saw it as affecting their interactions with their parents, which in turn affected the development of their character."¹⁴⁶ As such, the Second Generation is left with a deep and resonating inability to separate their lives from genocide and their parents' experiences.

¹⁴⁵ Pilcer, 120.

¹⁴⁶ Prince, 76.

CONCLUSION:

THE HOLOCAUST FROM THE FIRST TO THE SECOND GENERATION

*[Yom Hashoah] came once a year, but I didn't need a holiday. I remembered the Holocaust every day of my life. Never forget. That was my tattoo.*¹⁴⁷

The fact that the Holocaust has become so integral to the development of a modern American Jewish identity is evident throughout the literature of the Second Generation. The Holocaust entered into the lives of these children of survivors in a number of ways, and as such helped to create their own Jewish identity within America. It is through their literature that a number of members of the Second Generation began to struggle with coming to terms with the Holocaust and their position within a larger American Jewish community. Through the telling and retelling of their own stories and the experiences of their parents, these children of survivors provided a public platform, on which they and other children of survivors could congregate, relate to one another, and eventually share common experiences.

Many of these children of survivors have come to define their Jewish identity through the Holocaust. There is a difficulty in separating themselves from it; they feel as though their entire lives have been affected by it and therefore they must write either about their roles in coming to terms with the Holocaust or about the Holocaust itself. Without their own

¹⁴⁷ Pilcer, 44; author's original emphasis included.

Holocaust experience they begin to question how they fit into the larger Jewish community. They feel that they need to connect to the Holocaust in order to directly connect with their Jewishness. To be Jewish today is translated into a need to remember the Holocaust, and also to relate their own lives to this struggle of remembrance.

Pilcer writes in a poem of her identity as a Jew within the post-Holocaust environment of America, “Six million Jews died/ and I was born/ a child of the universe/ always, a child of the Holocaust.”¹⁴⁸ Pilcer demonstrates that these children of survivors are not just the next generation of a family, rather these children of survivors became much more than that. They are both the symbolic representation of the continuation of Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the embodiment of those who died. They live in an ambiguous temporal sense—a part of the present, but also a representation of the past, and the hope of the future. They are both the redemption of the Jewish people and yet as they grew up they were inundated with a constant feeling of inadequacy. The Holocaust surrounded them and yet they could never fully relate to it the way their parents and other survivors did. They are both insiders and outsiders in their post-Holocaust family. They are never able to live up to the expectations of their parents or able to measure up to the feats that their parents accomplished. These Second Generation survivors constantly compared themselves to their parents, to their relatives, and are subsequently left with a sense of doubt—doubt that they would have been able to survive themselves, doubt that their lives now are in any way as meaningful as their

¹⁴⁸ Pilcer, 82.

parents. The Holocaust surrounds them and forces them to question their own identity and their own place within the Jewish community. If the Holocaust is so entrenched in modern American Jewish identity, these children of survivors are left to question how they fit in amongst the real survivors. They feel their Holocaust connection intimately through their daily lives, through their childhood, through their relationships with their parents, and yet their connection is still handed down; it is not originally their own, but their parents.

While the identity of Second Generation survivors is full of contradictions and internal conflicts, the one event that tied these children together was their shared Holocaust experiences. Despite their lack of firsthand knowledge of the genocide, these children felt the response and influence of the Holocaust throughout their childhoods and into their adult lives and relationships. The Holocaust shaped and molded the ways in which these children interacted with their parents, with their peers, and ultimately shaped the way in which they saw and defined their own identity. They were not just children of survivors; they were survivors as well, even if this is only due to their relationship to their parents.

The next question for the Second Generation is the role of their children, the Third Generation, and how much the Holocaust should be allowed to enter into their lives. The role of the Second Generation as witnesses and talebearers in the absence of their parents creates a desire for them to carry on these stories to their children. However, these children of survivors are perhaps the most aware of the potential of the Holocaust to become a stifling force within these children's lives. In this sense no longer are the Second Generation

survivors passive responders to their parents' experiences, rather they now take on actions of their own. The Second Generation is now faced with an internal conflict of a desire to remember, to honor, and to tell the stories of their families' survivals. However, the Second Generation must also decide how much of the Holocaust is too much for their children. The Second Generation now becomes the means through which the Holocaust is carried forth for future generations.

**APPENDIX:
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

Bukiet, Melvin Jules: Was born in 1953 in New York City to two Holocaust survivors. He is a novelist and critic currently living in New York City. He graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. He received his MFA at Columbia University. He is the author of a number of novels, including *Sandman's Dust*, *After*, *While the Messiah Tarries*, *Signs and Wonders*, *Strange Fire*, and *A Faker's Dozen*. His works revolve around the Holocaust, his experiences as a Second Generation survivor, and the role of Polish Jews before the war. He currently lives in New York and teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

Eisenstein, Bernice: Was born in 1949, shortly after her parents immigrated to Canada. She received an honors degree in English literature from Yale University before moving to Israel and then on to England in order to study art. She is an artist whose illustrations have appeared in a variety of magazines and newspapers. She uses her skills as both a writer and illustrator to portray her novel *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. Her works have been published alongside a number of other American children of Holocaust survivors and her works have sold widely in the United States.

Epstein, Helen: Was born in Prague on November 27, 1947. She became a journalist in 1968 during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, where her account was published in the *Jerusalem Post*. In 1971 she graduated from Columbia University. Her first book *Children of the Holocaust* was published in 1979 and was quickly translated into a number of other languages. Her sequel is a memoir titled *Where She Came From*.

Pilcer, Sonia: Was born in 1949 in a Displaced Persons camp in Landsberg, Germany and was later raised in New York City. She began to write *The Holocaust Kid* in 1980 and was later published in 2001. She is the author of four other novels: *Teen Angel*, *Maiden Rites*, *Little Darlings*, and *I-Land: Manhattan in Monologue*. She currently teaches writing workshops in New York City.

Rosenbaum, Thane: Was born in New York City in 1960, the only son of two Holocaust survivors. Later he and his family moved to Miami Beach, where he went on to gain

his degrees from the University of Florida and the University of Miami. He gave up his profession as a Wall Street lawyer to begin writing and giving lectures on both the Holocaust and the ethics of the American legal system. He is an award-winning novelist, including such books as: *The Golems of Gotham*, *Secondhand Smoke*, and *Elijah Visible*. All of these novels deal with the Holocaust through the stories of Second Generation narrators. He currently lives in New York City and teaches courses in human rights, legal humanities, and law at Fordham Law School.

Spiegelman, Art: Was born in Stockholm, Sweden on February 15, 1948. He immigrated to the United States in his early childhood with his parents. He studied cartooning in high school and was drawing professionally by 16. He went on to major in art and philosophy at Harper College. He helped co-found *Arcade*, a comic review. In 1982, he received the Pulitzer Prize for his *Maus* series. He has also recently published graphic novels dealing with the September 11th attacks.

Stadner, S. Hanala: Grew up in Montreal. Although she did not spend her childhood in America, in 1972 she moved to Los Angeles to begin an acting career. As such her literature became a part of a literary movement in America during the late 1990s and early 2000s. She is currently working as a drug counselor.

Steinitz, Lucy: She was a former Coordinator of Academic Development in the Department of Jewish Studies at the City College of New York. She received her master's degree from Brandeis University and her PhD from the University of Chicago in Contemporary Jewish Studies. She and David M. Szonyi edited and published a collection of writings from Second Generation survivors in 1975. After it became increasingly popular the book was later republished in subsequent editions. In 1998 she established the Catholic AIDS Action, the first church-based response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa. She currently lives in Africa with her family and continues her work there.

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