Hear My Story: Joyce Kamen transcript

**Lisa MacVittie** 00:00

I'm the last survivor of the Holocaust in our family.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:04

Behind the words pictures and artifacts in the museum are people whose stories of survival and hope come alive to inspire new generations of upstanders, one by one, these stories stir the soul.

**Al Miller** 00:18

Can there really be hope for us?

**Bella Ouziel** 00:20

See, mine is 40018, my sister was 40017.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:28

Holocaust survivors, their descendants, liberators, champions of justice and courageous upstanders ask only this, hear my story so that the lessons they teach will echo for generations,

**Elisha Wiesel** 00:41

I will never meet someone else like my father, but there are many of us who, if we come together, can keep his voice alive.

**Jackie Congedo** 00:48

These stories will change you. They will move you to action, inspiring the best of humanity every day.

**Cori Silbernagel** 00:54

I'm Cori Silbernagel. In this episode of Hear My Story, you'll meet a woman who has spent years behind the camera, writing, producing and directing videos for the organizations that came before the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. Joyce Kamen was critical in capturing the testimonies of Cincinnati's Holocaust survivor and liberator communities. It was her steady hand that guided the collection of these oral histories, which serve as the foundation for the museum that exists here today. Joyce, welcome. It is such a pleasure to get to sit with you today. So much....so much of my work as our Director of Collections and Exhibitions has been informed by your work for our Center, so it's really thrilling to be able to learn a little bit more about that.

**Joyce Kamen** 01:51

Well, thank you. Thank you for having me, and I'm excited to talk about the project that so many of the survivors, most of whom are no longer here, made possible for the sake of history and for the sake of Cincinnati history, and more particularly, for this museum.

**Cori Silbernagel** 02:09

Yeah, yeah. So, so let's just dive in. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What...what brought you to this work.

**Joyce Kamen** 02:20

Yeah. So I, in addition to being a marketing communications professional throughout my career, I was an active volunteer for, I don't want to tell you how long decades in Cincinnati's Jewish community, and I always participated in YomHashoah, organizational, you know, some on committees and some participating as a reader. I did some on-air work for television and radio, so I was always tapped to come and be part of the program that we were presenting in any given year for Yom Hashoah, and got to know the organization. First it was "Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Cincinnati." Then it was the "Combined Generations of the Holocaust." And then, because I was in that field, and really known to most everyone, who comprised the Combined Generations of the Holocaust, in 1990, I think they came to me and asked if I would consider videotaping the oral histories of survivors of Nazism, survivors of the camps, survivors of the death camps and the work camps and the partisans, the resistance fighters, the liberators, those who were hidden, those who managed to flee, all, all of those comprised the whole of what we did, Starting in 1991 the project was completed in 1992 So all told, the first iteration of the project, we videotaped the oral histories of 36 survivors, and then when a couple of years later, when we mounted the effort to create a documentary that really comprised the whole landscape of experiences that we had recorded. We did some additional shootings. So all told 42 oral histories.

**Cori Silbernagel** 04:31

That's amazing. Had many of the survivors shared their story in this way before, or were some of them sharing for the first time,

**Joyce Kamen** 04:42

I would say most of them were sharing for the very first time. Some had, like Werner Coppel, and a few others had spoken in schools and had appeared on local television, telling their stories, especially during Yom Hashoah. They had, you know, they had definitely shared much of their stories, but I would say that the majority of them did not share their stories publicly. I will say most of them had shared their stories with their families, among each other in the survivor community - that was fairly common with some friends, but not publicly. There was one survivor who I interviewed, and before the interview began, she said, "I'm very nervous." And I said, "I understand it's it's an intimidating sort of thing to have cameras and microphones and things I said, But what you're doing is really rescuing history. Here you are doing a great service." She said, "Well, I just have to tell you that I have never spoken of my experiences before to anyone, to my children, to my husband, to my friends, to anyone." It was too difficult for her to sort of transmit her story face to face with people. She knew she loved people in the community, but she wanted them to know, and she said, "So I will tell my story to the tape, and the tape will relate my story to my family and to anyone else who needs to know my experience." I was so floored and taken by that it was that was a very there were many emotional moments during the taping of these 42 really courageous survivors, but that one spoke to me of just the first of all the the horrors that she experienced and her heart would not let her bring that, you know, she didn't want to, yeah, bring that burden to her children, but felt she had to do this for the sake of history and for the sake of their family as well. Yeah. So it was, it was a very emotional moment.

**Cori Silbernagel** 07:17

I also do some interviewing with Holocaust survivors. And you know one thing, you know we learn about when we, you know, go to the books and study oral history and how to collect oral history. You know you learn all the ethics around it, all of all of the policies and procedures. But when you you sit down with a Holocaust survivor, whether they've shared their story many times, or they're sharing for the first time, it's something I can't be prepared for, that I wasn't prepared for. So I can only imagine how you may have felt when you embarked on this, this huge project, and embarked on it at a time where where many had never shared before, where oral history testimony collection was somewhat new in the field.

**Joyce Kamen** 08:19

This was in advance of the Shoah project, Steven Spielberg's project. These tapes, as I understand it, are listed at the US Memorial Holocaust Museum under Project Eternity, which is the name of the project that we gave it first the Cincinnati project. But they're part of the whole collection of testimonials. And I'm, I'm so glad they live there, and they are, you know, I mean, it's, it's just priceless, the gift that these survivors gave us in history.

**Cori Silbernagel** 08:57

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think the, you know, survivor testimony offers us an opportunity not only to learn about the history, but to understand human nature and and aspects of rebuilding too. I think,

**Joyce Kamen** 09:11

Oh, definitely.

**Cori Silbernagel** 09:12

You know, one thing that I try to relate to students as they come through the museum is, you know, these survivors are not only defined by their survival during the Holocaust, their lives are much richer and fuller. And when you know, you sit and you watch this testimony that was recorded these years ago, you know, you're reminded that the fullness and richness of life is so much more so. Thank you so much for that work that took place then. I'm very curious to know how, how did the tapes come to the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum. It's certainly, you know, the biggest repository in our country for artifacts, archival materials and testimony too, among other things. How, how did this really special testimony project from our community make it to this global, national scale?

**Joyce Kamen** 10:24

So prior to beginning the taping of the oral histories, representatives from the museum itself came to Cincinnati to work with us for a weekend for all of those who wanted to be interviewers, because many of the children of survivors acted as interviewers, as well as myself, and to teach us, sort of what their best practices were. Again, this is in advance of the Shoah Foundation guidelines and all of that, but it was very important that weekend was extremely important, especially for me, to sort of get my head around, you know, was directing the oral history project, so to get my head around the task that lay before us, which was an awesome, monumental task that I, you know, I realized what import this would have in the years and generations to come, as did everyone else at the table. And so following that guidance and studying the guidance that they gave us of how to conduct these interviews, the most important questions to ask. In what order should we ask these questions? When to when to give the interviewee a break? When it's necessary to do that, make sure that they are comfortable, don't, you know, don't keep pressing when you know that they're really at the limit. And that did happen several times. We had to shut down and just let let the person just, you know, recover and calm down. Now this was back in the days of tape, not digital, so we had to stop down every 30 minutes, because these were 30 minute broadcast quality beta cam SP tapes. That was the industry standard back then, but now we have all digital but we had to naturally stop down every 30 minutes, some interviews went I don't think any interviews were less than 30 minutes. Most were an hour. Some were an hour and a half. We asked them to bring, per the instructions of the museum people, we asked them to bring artifacts, pictures of their lives, if they had any, you know, pre World War Two, pre Holocaust, any artifacts from their homes, or sometimes, we went into their homes to interview them as well, so that we could put on tape, just as a record of what you know they brought with them and their lives before the Holocaust. So once we started shooting, we had a good roadmap of how we were to proceed, and that was just incredibly helpful to me and to all the interviewers who were going to be helping out in this. So we always had in mind that these tapes would not just remain in Cincinnati. These tapes would need to be brought to the Holocaust Museum. And there was, Oh, should we ship them? Should we do this? And I thought, no, no, we're not going to do that. We are going to find a way to hand carry these as lovingly as we possibly could and as carefully as we possibly could to the museum where they would be loved and cared for, and just putting them on a UPS truck just did not seem congruous with the mission of the project. So coincidentally, right after the project finished in August of 1993 the museum had recently opened an Adath Israel congregation of which I am a member, was going to take a congregational day trip to DC to tour the museum and come back that night. So I asked the rabbi, who happened to be my brother in law, Rabbi Irvin Wise, if he would be willing to, sort of, you know, help us, you know, bring these tapes to the museum in in a quasi formal presentation, up in the archives. And that's what we did. We brought all of the tapes that day, August 2, 1993 to the museum, met one of the archivists up in the archives. I don't remember exactly what I said to her in the company of some of the people traveling with us and our Rabbi, Irvin wise, but it was something along the lines of, these are here and permanently gifted to you to rest here and tell these stories in perpetuity that are just so vital to all of human history. I don't think that's an overstatement, and our Rabbi, Irvin Wise also spoke about the significance of that moment to deliver those dozens and dozens and dozens of tapes to the museum. And when I first saw the postings of them on their website, it took some time, but And now, you know, looking, I do look at them from time to time on the museum's website, and no, it's emotional for me, because it brings back the feelings that I had coming, literally coming out of each interview. There was a physical fatigue. But more than that, there was an emotional, sort of, you know, feeling that sometimes I would feel like I am sad, that I had to make them say these things that were so uncomfortable for them to recall, and that was one of the things they guided us in that weekend, from the people who came from the museum, but retrospectively, when I listen to some of them and I see some of them on the video screens here In the museum, I'm so grateful to have had an opportunity to play a role in bringing these stories into the stream of history and the courage of each one of These survivors, regardless of the nature of their story was a testament to human resilience and their resolve to build, as you said, a fuller, better life. I didn't know these stories of most of these people. I knew them as part of the community, and I knew them for who they were, their families and their activities and the things that you know, they contributed to the life of the Greater Cincinnati Jewish community and general community as well. They've, you know, it's all woven into the fabric of life throughout the city of Cincinnati and Greater Cincinnati and now well beyond, to learn of these things in an intimate interview setting, you know things that I never knew before, of what what they endured, and to see how resilient they were to build these lives, professionals and business people, and you know family people, and you know children and grandchildren and all of these things that defined their lives, you know, 40, 50, years after the Holocaust. You know, to take them back to those days, it speaks volumes about who they were and how they were able to build a life after so much suffering and loss.

**Cori Silbernagel** 18:39

Yeah. Well, I can, I can tell that these, these interviews, still impact you today. And I think you know so very often we, you know, we carry forward the mission of sharing the stories, but, but you really don't very often think about the process happening behind the scenes, all of that work of asking the questions and gathering the artifacts, all of the work that the survivors put in to prepare for their interview, and the role that you played as the interviewer, and kind of having a balance, a careful balance and juggling act of of helping support the survivor that you're interviewing, someone that you know, another side of in your everyday life, someone you care about, but also balancing your own well being as the interviewer, I think you know that's something that's hard for me, so I I find it very inspiring to learn about how you were feeling in those days, and now you know that we're years down the line. I think it's really meaningful and inspiring that it still impacts you, that these stories you still carry with you. Switching gears a little bit. One thing that I think is incredibly special about when the testimony tapes were delivered to USHMM, I think it is so special that they were delivered by our community. They weren't shipped, and not only because they were too precious to be shipped, but that this, this was a storytelling, story capturing initiative that that began with the community of the survivors and their descendants coming together to to help capture these stories. But it also it continues to be a community project. And I think even even you know, going back to 2017 or or 18, when we were designing the museum here, the Project Eternity tapes were were so important to us, because in designing this museum, we didn't, you know, we didn't begin with the goal of sharing a comprehensive history of the Holocaust. We wanted to share the stories of our local survivor community, and through telling those stories, the history was revealed, and we really wouldn't have been able to do that had there not been so much care and and time invested to document those stories. I mean, we, you know, we organizationally truly stand on the shoulders of our predecessor organizations, the Survivors of Nazism, the Combined Generations of the Holocaust. And your work is so interwoven into all the iterations of of our organizational history.

**Joyce Kamen** 22:23

Well, I appreciate that. I also feel like I need to point out that the the core committees that were organized within the Combined Generations of the Holocaust really drove the project. They made sure we had funding to do the project. Because, you know, videotaping is, is even then, you know, it's a, it's, it's a, it's a business. And so while we were able to get nonprofit pricing for it, we still had, you know, they had to raise the money. They had to really shepherd the project through to fruition, to make sure that we could do what we had to do there. And so if I mention one name, I'll forget another. So I'm not going to mention any names, but those people on the Combined Generations of the Holocaust, who drove this project forward, are really to be commended for their incredible dedication to this project.

**Cori Silbernagel** 23:30

Yeah, I agree. I think, you know, today, reflecting on, you know our volunteer leadership to the docents within our museum to those helping us develop educational material and programs. A lot of those individuals that participated in the Combined Generations group, they've stayed with us this entire time and still continue to be committed to the mission of our center. But even more, I think this, this greater mission of of lifting up the stories of the survivors within our community, to ensure that those stories are not forgotten.

**Joyce Kamen** 24:16

And for a good reason, because I know one of our our museums, I feel like a family member here

**Cori Silbernagel** 24:26

You are!

**Joyce Kamen** 24:27

but I you know one of the core external outreach components of it is to communicate the essential nature of being an upstander, and to the extent that these stories inspire new generations after generation after generation to become upstanders and to protect the sanctity of... the dignity of human life ofwherever you know, across the globe, is is more important now than ever. I would, I would say.

**Cori Silbernagel** 25:08

Absolutely and and I know that your work continues today. You You're an endlessly creative person, and I've heard that you have now launched into storytelling through children's books. Yes. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**Joyce Kamen** 25:27

Yes. So my my granddaughter Lily, second daughter of my son, Ari, who and his wife Jessica, of course, is studying in a Jewish Day School in New Jersey. She did a project with her class featuring the stories of two Holocaust survivors from their community in Greater New Jersey and greater Livingston New Jersey around there. And she's an artist, and has been since when she was four years old, she was doing something I said, You know what you did that much better than BU, which is what she calls me. And she she was she, she's been gifted since she was born. So she did all the illustrations for that book with her class, and she was so inspired by it, she called me a few months after that project, and she said, I'd like to do another project, but I want to do it with you, Bubbie. She knew I was a writer, and she also knew the story of her Papa, Fred, my husband, who found his biological family in 2013. He'd been adopted at birth, and learned that an Arab Muslim physician from Egypt who was living in Berlin during the during World War II had saved his biological mother from deportation to Auschwitz, and she knew the entire story, and she said, I'd like for us to do Papa Fred's story. So she said, Would you do that with me, Bubbie? I said, I don't think I could ever be honored more than to help tell this story of this beautiful man, this courageous un, this so unselfish, so determined to do the right thing, so determined to be an upstander that he risked his life for two years to save Fred's biological mother by devising a very complicated plan of sort of hiding her in plain sight. He converted her with fake documents from the Islamic Institute of Berlin, fake identity papers, a fake wedding to a Muslim man, changed her name, you know, bought for her the traditional female garb for for an Arab Muslim woman. And because he was Egyptian, he had been arrested three times, and a condition of his release from prison would be for him to go into the SS headquarters in Berlin and attend to the medical needs of the SS officers, and he didn't want Anna, Fred's biological mother, who he was helping to have to go into hiding for very long. And you know, she was a young girl, and to put her in a dark garden shed, which is where he was hiding her. So he actually trained her to be his medical assistant, and took her with him into the SS headquarters, right into the mouth of the lion. So it turned into the story of Anna and Dr Helmy, with Lily creating the pictures, and she illustrated the entire book, and I wrote this story, and we are just finishing our second book, together with a local Holocaust survivor here in Cincinnati, telling her incredible story. She's really dedicated to this, and she said, very special. And she and I asked her, I said, Lily, what did you learn from this project? And she said, "I learned that my generation," she's 17 years old, "is going to need to be the keeper of these stories". So I thought, yeah, it's come full circle. She will pick up where maybe her Bubbie left off.

**Cori Silbernagel** 29:55

Yeah, that's beautiful,

**Joyce Kamen** 29:56

and tells these stories.

**Cori Silbernagel** 29:57

That's beautiful. And I hope that she, sounds like she will, that she'll continue hearing the spirit of collaboration and community and connection with people. I love, that that this book is created as much from her as it is from you.

**Joyce Kamen** 30:22

Absolutely,

**Cori Silbernagel** 30:23

really special.

**Joyce Kamen** 30:24

Absolutely, when you have time and you look at the illustrations, you can see how how evocative her drawings are. I didn't give her any direction. We decided on which elements of the story would be assigned a picture. And she, you know, conceived of and drew the drawings herself, and they're very empathic and emotional, and which, which told me she so understood the assignment, if you will. You know she... she said she wanted to treat Anna's story - of course, Fred never met Anna. She passed away before we found the biological family, and of course, she didn't know her - but she wanted to treat Anna's story as a work of art, out of respect for what she endured and for what Dr Helmy did to save her. So it was a very it was a... it was a learning and growing process for us both. Was an incredible experience, and I'm so glad she came to me and said, "I want to do another one."

**Cori Silbernagel** 31:43

That's great, and I think it's such a creative and memorable way to share this, this vision of a world of upstanders, right? And that we, you know, we not only, it's not only important that we learn about the past, and we remember these stories, but that we actually take the lessons from these stories of rescue and survival and resilience, and, you know, apply them to today to be upstanding Exactly. I think it sounds like she gets it.

**Joyce Kamen** 32:16

She, she definitely gets it. What's interesting to note is that when, when I was doing the Project Eternity, back in the early 90s and up until about 2015, I had no idea that my family had some history with family members not surviving the Holocaust. I didn't

**Cori Silbernagel** 32:45

Very interesting.

**Joyce Kamen** 32:46

I didn't know because we had always asked my father, whose parents emigrated here from two small shtetls in Poland, two small communities and Jewish communities in Poland. My grandmother used to say, sometimes we woke up in Poland. Sometimes we woke up in Russia, but she was, you know, on the on the border... right, but they emigrated here in 1921 so feeling like they they were here in 21 so they, you know, didn't escape the Holocaust. What I found out subsequently through a deep dive in ancestry, because I thought to myself, after we found Fred's family and all of the other stories that went with that, and there are other stories to be told there too, I thought there's no way that my family came from Poland, where they came from, and because they they all didn't get out. So my father never talked about it. It was too disturbing for him to even think about the Holocaust, not just about... I don't think he knew. I don't think his parents talked about it, or maybe they didn't know what happened. Regardless, I learned that my father's uncle became a physician and moved to Lodz, Poland and was one of 300 Jewish doctors that was rounded up in one one of the actions taken by the Soviet secret police In 1941 and taken to the Katyn forest and massacred there. I also learned that later in Brest, my father's grandmother and all of his cousins perished there during those killing sprees in Brest in 1942 and 43 and when my husband and I went to Auschwitz, we saw their names in the book of names at Auschwitz, confirming that they were all they were all from those shtetls, all from those communities where they were all related, all his cousins, aunts, uncles, grandmothers. And so when Lily and I were doing the book, we talked about the fact that, you know, a lot of her ancestors were also affected by the crimes and murders committed during the Holocaust, which may have steeled her resolve even more to continue this project. She's going to be in college next year. We'll see if she's going to do another one the the next book should be ready within the next six weeks.

**Cori Silbernagel** 35:28

I think she will. I have a feeling.

**Joyce Kamen** 35:30

I have a feeling too, yes.

**Cori Silbernagel** 35:34

How? How did learning your own family connection to the Holocaust... How did that... How has it influenced and changed your perspective in the work that you do? It must be hard to to work in difficult history that you are also both deeply connected to in many different ways.

**Joyce Kamen** 36:01

I think that knowing my own family's history now really puts it in puts some a lot of things in perspective. For me, I feel like so many Jews around the world may or may not know their connections to the Holocaust in a familial way, I understand more deeply now my father's reticence to ever even talk about the Holocaust. He used to tear up. He never you know he was born in America, but I think on some visceral level, he knew that he had family that couldn't have survived, just couldn't have survived. Shortly before he passed away in 2022 I bought him a book on Drohiczyn, which is one of the communities in which my grandfather grew up. And he relished reading that, because it was mostly all pre Holocaust. And I think he knew and I think many other family Jewish families around the world, if they haven't discovered it yet, it's there for finding. I can't imagine that many Jews from East who descend from Eastern Europe do not have family who was somehow affected by the those dark days of the Holocaust. But it you know, like you said, there's a there was always a connection, because I knew my grandparents were from Poland. I knew my grandmother's family was from Germany, and my other grandfather's family was from Romania. So I knew there had... I didn't even... if I didn't know what I think as a Jewish person who knew her roots. There was always a connection there. There was always, was always a sort of a family-hood between myself and the interviewees and the, you know, the the people who knew their stories, I felt that there was always that sort of, I don't know, an unknowing connection, but a connection nevertheless.

**Cori Silbernagel** 38:32

Yeah, well, it's, it's a connection of, of shared place, in some ways, shared, shared experience in history, yes, like it's, it lives in your bones, right?

**Joyce Kamen** 38:46

It does.

**Cori Silbernagel** 38:49

I think, I think that must have been why some of the survivors felt connected to you and and that they could trust you as they sat down to record their testimonies. Do you think that's the case? Why did they decide to share their stories with you or with the others that were part of this project?

**Joyce Kamen** 39:12

Yeah, I think, I think I had been, you know, fairly visible within the community for years and so, and they knew that, you know, I had worked on behalf of the community in various organizations for a very long time. And I think there's, you know, there's a we talk about the Jewish community. I'm going to hearken back to the Jewish community. Then Jewish communities change and evolve over time. But if I'm thinking about late 80s, early 90s Jewish communities Cincinnati, I'm thinking of a community that was so interconnected in in multiple ways, because of the contributions from without, the Jewish community from externally and those within as well. And certainly I was present in a in a lot of those communal activities. So there was a I wasn't a fresh face. They knew me, and of course, they knew the other interviewers who were also children of survivors. And they knew they were, their stories were, were safe in our hands.

**Cori Silbernagel** 40:40

Yeah. Wow. After the testimonies were collected, you know, then comes the task of starting to think about how, how they can be used, how they can how they can be shared. You, you and others in the community brought the tapes to be shared on a large scale at ushmm, they're all online today. We reflect on them all the time at work here, but tell me about the documentary series that grew from this Project Eternity testimonies, right?

**Joyce Kamen** 41:25

So once the tapes were delivered in 1993 the Combined Generations of the Holocaust once again, asked me to come to a meeting to decide how to use these stories to tell sort of a give, give a global sense to what the experience and experiences were of these survivors, the resistors, the rescuers, other other people who had experiences outside of the camps that you know were just as harrowing. How could we tell the whole of the Holocaust experience? And the way to do that was to create a documentary, taking some excerpts from the project eternity tapes, and shooting additional tapes for specific sort of aspects of the of the story, we needed to really drill down in to give the viewer that sense of this is what it was like to be in a concentration camp. This is what it was like to be a partisan and a resistor. This is what it was like to liberate a concentration camp postwar. This, this... to give them the the full feel of what happened to the survivors who came to Cincinnati. And so they began to raise money for the effort, which require, which would require, again, more video taping, studio editing, of course, getting the script together, the shooting had to take place. But there's an interesting story. If we have time, it'll just a couple of minutes. There was the imperative that we have some footage that would take us back to those days so from from the time of the Holocaust, that the archival archival footage? Yes, so we went to first to contacted Brandeis University, who has a an expansive archive of this archival footage from the period. And unfortunately, they were unable to provide us with the footage because it was going to be too expensive for us. It was something like $1,500 a finished minute, which we didn't have the budget for that. And the reason was that the copyright of those was held by a company in Germany called Transit, and we would have to pay that company to use that footage. Without getting into it, that just seemed so wrong to me. There was no way I was going to really, I would say, insult their integrity by doing that.

**Joyce Kamen** 44:28

So we went looking literally... We called England, and there was... we called Israel, and we, anyway, we finally, I finally, had a phone call one day with a gentleman at the Jewish War Veterans in Boulder, Colorado, and I told him what we were doing, and I asked him if they had any archival footage for the stories we were going to tell. And he said, "Yes, we do. Much of it has not yet been seen. So if you want to log through the tapes," and I said, "I'm going to need high quality tapes." Back then it was beta cam, but they had them on another format, which was the generation before, called three quarter inch tapes. He said he would make me duplicate masters of those, send it to us, then we would have to make VHS copies with time code just to sort of log through them, and the only cost was just duplicating the tapes. So that's how we got all of that archival footage from the Jewish War Veterans to whom I'm indebted to today for this documentary. The documentary was screened at an opening here at the Jewish Community Center in 1995. Subsequently, WCET aired it here, and they aired it actually every year. For many years, I don't think they still do it, but they aired it on Yom Hashoah every every year, and then it won a regional Emmy. And it also was WCET sent it up to PBS syndication service, and it was syndicated to 111 markets around the country. So and one of our survivors connected to someone from his community who'd seen the documentary in Florida and called him and said, "Did I see you on a documentary on and"

**Cori Silbernagel** 44:28

Oh I love that it had such a reach.

**Cori Silbernagel** 44:28

Yeah.

**Joyce Kamen** 45:10

They reconnected after so many years.

**Cori Silbernagel** 46:43

Wow, that's amazing. Yeah, what... do you have any idea what the general sense was among the survivor community of of having their stories, you know, curated into this documentary, then is, is playing all over the place?

**Joyce Kamen** 47:06

I think there were, there's, there were two sort of overarching responses from the survivor community to the documentary. The first was, "We, our voices are being heard." And that was very gratifying to them. The other part of it was that, you know, the documentary, because of all the archival footage that was in it, brought them back to a really tough place for them to be so... and I cringe at the notion that that made them uncomfortable, but it it was so essential to the storytelling to understand what they endured and to have the viewer come awaywith, "Could I have survived the way they did? Given what I just saw, I don't understand how one human being can do this to another, and we've got to do better." So was little duality of reactions in the survivor community.

**Cori Silbernagel** 48:18

Interesting, interesting. Yeah, it's, it's always fascinating for me to, you know, to have spent a lot of time learning about our survivor community, but also having not begun my work here until 2015. So many of the survivors I didn't have a chance to meet so, so it's fascinating to take everything I know and then to hear some, some, you know, perspectives on, you know, what, what was, what were they actually thinking at that point in time.

**Joyce Kamen** 48:59

I remember at the screening, the the premiere of the documentary at the Jewish the old Jewish Community Center on Summit road, I remember the first time the image of Hitler appeared. There was there were audible boos in the in the audience, throughout the audience, I was living with this documentary so long that I knew it was coming, and I had seen it, you know, 100 times before in the editing process. And I had to stop myself and think and sit... this is, you know, you're not in the editing room anymore. Look at it for the first time when they you know, when they booed Hitler's image on the screen. Look at it with them. And now... then tell me how you know that you know you you understand how they feel. Because that was, I was. I was I wasn't expecting that. I certainly should have, because it was the right response, but it shocked me into looking at it with them, as if it was the first time.

**Cori Silbernagel** 50:15

 Yeah, yeah. So today, you still continue to work in Holocaust education. You still are deeply involved within our organization here. What? What has inspired you to continue doing the work? You know, why? Why are you still on this journey with us after so long?

**Joyce Kamen** 50:46

Well, first of all, this is one of greater Cincinnati's premier organizations, premier museums, the job that you all have done to create this space. I you know, I'm a writer, and I have no words. So, you know, it's really, it's really just, I'm awestruck over and over again. I think there are many reasons why I feel like this is a place where the work of repairing a broken world can start for so many and I feel like the emphasis that the museum puts on its upstander program and upstander education teaching people to stand up and rise for justice for others, don't be a bystander and just watch while other people suffer or are delivered injustice after injustice. This is where the work begins, and now I'm retired, but and I, you know, I still feel like when we're here on Earth, if we have some time to give, if we have some passion to give, still where, you know, I thought about it consciously. What do you want to do in retirement. Retirement for me wasn't, you know, sitting back and, you know, staying in my pajamas all day, which actually, from time to time, sounds good, but I don't do that. That's great. Sometimes that's great. But I want to feel as if, because this museum exists and provides a place and a platform for which to begin to repair the world in its many, many broken places. And if I have some time to give to that, it's, it's, it's a not, it's, it's a no brainer. I have to be here. I want to be here. And I feel like sometimes when I tell my husband's story of how his biological mother and I talk to high school student groups, mainly here, when I'm a docent here, and I tell them that the bravery, the sheer bravery, of this Arab Muslim, Egyptian doctor, to save his biological mother. I don't tell them that. I you know the beginning. I just tell them the story. And I said, Would you believe that someone who saved another person during World War Two in Nazi occupied Berlin can still be saving lives today. And they look at me like, Well, no, they're dead. And I said, You're wrong. I said, because Dr Helmy saved my husband's mother, biological mother, she had a chance at life. Came to New York, had three children. Fred was her first born. Fred became a doctor, and is saving he has in his career. Maybe it's an underestimation, but he has saved 1000s of lives, and without Dr Helmy saving Anna, Fred wouldn't be here to save any life. That's how Dr help me is still saving lives today, and they're struck silent. And I said, so all you have to do is decide to be an upstander in this moment, and that means you can either help someone who's having trouble crossing a street. You can stop bullying on a playground. You can give some of your allowance money to the free store, food bank, whatever it is that you can do to stand up for others. All you have to do is decide to do it right now and you are a. An upstander. And I think they go out with their shoulders held a little higher, you know, and their heads a little higher, yeah, knowing that. And it start, the work is here. That's why I'm here, yeah.

**Cori Silbernagel** 55:14

Well, thank you it. It is such an honor. Again, I started with this. And I'll end saying something, you know, along the same lines that so much of my work in in, you know, acting as as this keeper of the stories, so much of it is influenced by the work that you and the others working with you did. I don't think that we would be here today as as you know this, this beautiful museum in historic Union Terminal where many of the survivors first arrived to. We would not, we would not be in the space to share these stories, and we may not even know of the stories in the first place, had it not been for this really important work that's taken place. I have one final question for you, as you as you look back on the different projects that we've talked about today and the other work that that we we didn't even get a chance to talk about, what are you the most proud of?

**Joyce Kamen** 56:36

I would say, I would say I'm most proud of being entrusted with this project by the combined generations of the Holocaust and the survivors themselves. I am most proud that they they put in my hands the most important precious parts of their history and their stories and their lives that that was so difficult for for them to carry. I hope in in some way, and I, I believe it's true for not all, but many, the telling of their stories to the interviewers or to myself or being part of this project, lifted their burden a bit, knowing they they never wanted to tell the story again. They didn't have to. The story would tell itself. But to be entrusted with something of this magnitude and importance, not just for Cincinnati, but as you said there, you know, it's seen around around the world. And the fact that the organization that that mounted this project, this is what became of this organization, this very museum, which is really peerless in nature.

**Cori Silbernagel** 58:27

I'm proud of that too well. Thank you so much for sitting with us today.

**Joyce Kamen** 58:33

Thank you for having me, Cori. Pleasure.

**Jackie Congedo** 58:36

To make sure you don't miss an episode, subscribe to our channel on YouTube. Let us know your thoughts on this episode. Our email is in the show notes. You can also connect with us on Instagram and Tiktok @holocaustandhumanity and X and Facebook @cincyhhc. Hear My Story is a production of the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center. The Center's mission is to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. This series is part of the Cynthia and Harold Guttman Family Center for Storytelling and is generously supported by Margaret and Michael Valentine. Visit us in person at historic Union Terminal in Cincinnati, Ohio, or online at Holocaustandhumanity.org.

**Jackie Congedo** 59:15

Managing producer is Anne Thompson. Consulting producer is Joyce Kamen. Technical producer is Robert Mills, Technical Director is Josh Emerson. Select music is by kick Lee. This is recorded at the Nancy and David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.