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# Remembering Interactions

## Interpreting Survivors' Accounts of Interactions in Nazi-Occupied Poland

### Abstract

This paper examines how memory sources are vital to learning about and interpreting children's interactions in Nazi-occupied Poland. In particular, it focuses on the relevance of testimonies and memoirs to understanding hidden Jewish children's contacts with other children while they were living under a false identity. Because these personal memory sources reveal many day-to-day situations not present in other types of documents and sources, they are often the only avenue through which we can learn about how Jewish children interacted with other children they came into contact with while in hiding. Two methods and situations receive particular attention:

1. collecting as many resources as possible for a specific case study on Jewish street children in occupied Warsaw, and
2. interpreting a variety of sources from diverse cases to find patterns of interactions that took place throughout Nazi-occupied Poland.

"I remember my cousin and me playing a strange wartime hide and seek. On her signal 'German' we'd both jump into a big wicker laundry basket, pull the cover over us, and keep silent. When I say 'they're gone' we get out. I was three."<sup>1</sup>

"Well, I do remember once in a while going home [kids] yelled after me 'Żyd' [...] teasing the Jewish children [...] but another girl or a boy would come over and say, 'Hey, he is stupid, don't pay attention,' so there were all kinds."<sup>2</sup>

Such recollections, in spoken or written form, demonstrate the ways in which children's interactions appear throughout historical sources, and how child survivors of the Holocaust remember them. When working towards understanding and accessing information about interactions among children during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, there is one category of historical sources that provides the most information, and that is personal sources, including diaries, letters, artwork, memoirs, and written and oral testimony/interviews. These sources contain details about everyday life that may not be present in official documents or other archival material. Among those personal sources, memory sources are often the most revealing when it comes to the nature of children's interactions with each other, if only because so many child survivors did not record their experiences during the war. Some recorded

1 Never Forget to Lie, dir. Marian Marzynski, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/never-forget-to-lie/> (14 May 2016).

2 Visual History Archive (VHA), USC Shoah Foundation, Testimony of Tema Herskovits, Interview 22052 (10 November 2015).

their experiences immediately after, while others waited decades to share their stories.<sup>3</sup>

Memory sources also contain a layer of interpretation – such as hindsight or the acquisition of additional knowledge – which documents of the time may not convey. The number of post-war child survivor testimonies far outnumbers the amount of wartime diaries, letters, and drawings, many of which were lost, destroyed, or never created. Post-war testimonies and memoirs are more widely available. Thus, in a practical sense, they provide the most information about survivors' experiences, though they are limiting in that the experiences of those who did not survive cannot be told unless they are referenced in the account of another surviving witness.<sup>4</sup>

This paper focuses on testimonies and memoirs by those who were children during the war, to analyse how they may be useful in examining interactions among children during the Nazi occupation of Poland, and how these survivors remember their experiences. Contact with other children was an integral part of many children's wartime experiences, including those of hidden Jewish children. In Poland, Jewish children hid under false identities in convents, orphanages, private homes, or out in the open on city streets. These children – and their encounters – were 'hidden' because the children always had to hide, at the very least, their identities, if not their actual physical presence. There are three types of situations for 'hidden encounters' examined in this project, and these provide the context for this paper:

1. hiding under a false identity in convents,
2. hiding in a private home, either completely hidden or posing as a relative, orphan, or employee,
3. hiding 'in the open' as a street child without regular adult supervision.

Whether or not the children that the Jewish child encountered knew their true identity varied from situation to situation. In some hiding situations, children had little or no contact with other children. The level of contact depended on how necessary it was for the child to be completely concealed from the outside world. However, most hidden Jewish children did have at least some contact with other children – Jewish or non-Jewish – during the war.

3 Joanna Michlic has conducted significant research into the importance of these early post-war testimonies. See Joanna Beata Michlic, *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland: Survival and Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust as Reflected in Early Postwar Recollections*, in: *Yad Vashem, Search and Research – Lectures and Papers*, Volume 14, Jerusalem 2008. See also Joanna Michlic, *The Children Accuse (Poland 1946): Between Exclusion from and Inclusion into the Holocaust Canon*, in: Krzysztof Ruchniewicz/Jürgen Zinnecker (eds.), *Zwischen Zwangsarbeit, Holocaust und Vertreibung. Polnische, jüdische und deutsche Kinderheiten im besetzten Polen*, Weinheim/München 2007, 43-52. See also Boaz Cohen, *The Children's Voice: Post-war Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21 (2007) 1, 73-95. Also important to this project are testimonies housed at the Ghetto Fighters' House Archives in Israel. I was able to access large portions of this collection digitally at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., in October 2015. The collection includes interviews conducted by Benjamin Tenenbaum in early post-war Poland. Hundreds of children wrote down short accounts of their wartime experiences. *Ghetto Fighters' House – Beit Lohamei Haghettaot*, Jerusalem, digitised, accessed at the USHMM, Washington, D.C.: October until November 2015. RG-68.112M. For additional early post-war testimonies, see Maria Hochberg-Marianska/Noah Gris/Bill Johnston (eds.), *The Children Accuse*. London 1996. On a trip to Warsaw, I visited the Jewish Historical Institute; their resources include over 7,000 testimonies. The Central Jewish Historical Commission also collected testimonies until 1948; some of these have been published and accessed for this project. Later collections accessed in Warsaw include those written testimonies of the Association of Children of the Holocaust in Poland. They provided me and the VWI with five volumes of testimonies in Polish; two of these collections have been translated into English to date. See Wiktoria Sliwowska (ed.), *The Last Eyewitnesses: Children of the Holocaust Speak*, Vol. 1. Evanston 1998 and Jakub Gutenbaum/Agnieszka Latała, *The Last Eyewitnesses: Children of the Holocaust Speak*, Vol. 2. Evanston 2005.

4 See Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, New Haven 1991, 21.

The horrors of war and oppression complicated the idea of a 'child'. Most of the children in this study ranged from approximately three to 16 years old as of 1939. Many of them were separated from or had lost parents due to the circumstances of Nazi occupation: violence, hunger, poverty, disease, deportations, and the need to separate the family in order to survive. These children had to take on new wartime responsibilities, such as the role of breadwinner or protector. Children with no steady adult presence in their lives were frequently drawn to and dependent on the company of other children, and sometimes an older child would become a caregiver. The desperate circumstances of occupation prompted the oppressed populations to take extraordinary measures to protect themselves, their families, and friends, often behaving in ways they would not outside of wartime. Children helped each other, stood by when witnessing inhumane practices, denounced each other, collaborated with occupation forces, and made difficult choices that they believed could help their survival.

### **The Nature of Hidden Jewish Children's Interactions with Other Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland**

Children created their own spaces of survival, safety, risk, and danger among themselves within the adult-controlled environment of Nazi-occupied Poland, with views and behaviours that both mirrored those of adults and were unique to their experiences as children struggling to survive in times of war. Poland presents a complex case study for hidden children, and rescue in Poland has been explored in different contexts by scholars including Nechama Tec, Eva Fogelman, Nahum Bogner, and Ewa Kurek. While Poland has a long history of antisemitism – primarily religious and nationalistic prior to the Nazi occupation – thousands of Poles also risked their lives to help Jews during the war. It is important to note that rescue and anti-semitism, or at least belief in some anti-Jewish stereotypes, were not always mutually exclusive; there were some rescuers who were antisemitic, or who had at least grown up believing Catholic church-taught myths about Jews. Some Poles also received financial compensation for their aid, and threatened to turn the Jews they harboured over to the Gestapo if payment stopped.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, as the only country under Nazi occupation where rescuers received the death penalty if caught, the high risk increased the complexity of emotions and motivations associated with rescue. Children were placed in these hiding situations by parents who hoped to save them, or were left to fend for themselves after losing their family to starvation, disease, or deportation. Hiding situations differed depending on the Jewish child's physical appearance, Polish language ability, gender, and socioeconomic status. Children with what was considered a 'good' appearance (such as fair hair and blue eyes) and/or Polish free of a Yiddish accent were more likely to be placed in a convent or private home under a false identity because they could pass as a Catholic Pole. Girls were also more likely to hide in the open or be taken in by a Polish family who knew they were Jewish, because there was no physical proof that they were Jewish; circumcision was a sure sign that a boy was Jewish, as Polish Catholic boys were not circumcised.<sup>6</sup> Some very young Jewish boys were

5 Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Occupied Poland*, New York 1986. Jan Grabowski, *Rescue for Money: Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939–1945*, in: *Yad Vashem, Search and Research – Lectures and Papers*, Volume 13, Jerusalem 2008.

6 Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 35.

even hidden as girls during the war so that they – and their protectors – would be safer.<sup>7</sup>

In most cases, interactions consisted of either relationships that evolved over time with unpredictable outcomes, or brief chance contacts that shaped a child's wartime experience in some way. This project examines each case of interaction with the awareness that every encounter was influenced by circumstance and the specific children involved. Factors such as age, gender, location, and socioeconomic status and, above all, ethnicity and religion influenced the nature of encounters with other children. Situations varied from child to child and reflected the multiple ways that they coped with the disaster directly affecting – and in many cases, ultimately destroying – their lives. The complexity of each individual situation emerges in testimonies and memoirs.

An encounter between Jewish and non-Jewish children, as well as among Jewish children hiding under a false identity, could either be brief or regular, coincidental or coordinated. For example, an occasional or incidental encounter could include a one-time denunciation threat that was not followed up, a short stay with a non-Jewish family that also had children, or brief contact with a young person who helped the child escape the ghetto. Continuous encounters could include regular, ongoing bullying and blackmail from the same person or group, a long stay with a family or in a convent with other children, or regular cooperation while smuggling and peddling on the streets. These encounters can be interpreted on a spectrum between bullying and friendship. Bullying could range from mere teasing to outright blackmail threats. Factors such as antisemitism, opportunism, fear, and indifference played a role in shaping encounters, just as background, age, Polish-language ability, appearance, gender, and personality did. Children's contacts reveal nuances in Polish-Jewish relations beyond those layers illustrated by adults, and complicate categories such as resister, collaborator, and bystander primarily employed by Holocaust scholars in relation to adults.

Historians writing about children during the Holocaust have argued that play and imagination, including activities such as games, artwork, and writing, were means of coping with, making sense of, and escaping the world around them. In particular, Patricia Heberer-Rice and George Eisen have analysed the role of children's imagination and play both individually and in groups.<sup>8</sup> It is on these premises of children coming together as a component of coping, and the notion of children's creation of spaces mentioned above, that my interpretation of children's interactions rests. What means of mental and physical escape did children employ independently and among each other? How did individual coping differ from that of a group? How did children deal with fear, including potential fear of another child? In examining children's interactions, this research situates itself across the fields of Polish-Jewish relations, rescue and resistance, and children during the Holocaust in order to better understand children's participation in wartime activities, resistance to oppression, and their significance as shapers of history. Working

7 See for example the testimony of Abraham Foxman, who related that at a gathering for former hidden children, many of them were women, and some of the men shared that they had been hidden as girls: VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Testimony of Abraham Foxman, Interview 41475 (9 January 2015). See also the story of Bernhard Kempler, who spent four years as a girl, cited in Jennifer Marlow, *Polish Catholic Maids and Nannies: Female Aid and the Domestic Realm in Nazi-Occupied Poland*, PhD diss., Michigan State University 2014, 212, as well as the story of a boy named 'Curly' who had 'outfoxed' Hitler 'dressed as a girl,' in: Jack Kuper, *Child of the Holocaust: A Jewish Child in Christian Disguise*, London 2006.

8 Patricia Heberer, *Children during the Holocaust*, Maryland 2001. George Eisen, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games among the Shadows*, Amherst 1988.

towards a nuanced interpretation of children's interactions that addresses each of the questions above requires a look at personal, memory-based sources, including testimonies and memoirs.

### Methods: Finding and Examining Children's Interactions Through Memory Sources

There is more than one possible approach to collecting accounts of and interpreting children's interactions:

1. selecting a few case studies as representative or as a significant sample, or
2. collecting and analysing a critical mass of testimony, as in Christopher Browning's *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp*, in which he examined a large number of testimonies to get at a "core memory" of the place and events described in his book.<sup>9</sup>

In some sense, this project uses a mix of both approaches. On one level, it looks at specific examples – such as that of a group of Jewish children selling cigarettes in Three Crosses Square in Warsaw – as representative of the multiple kinds of interactions between children. Yet it also includes a large number of testimonies and memoirs as evidence of the specific instances, patterns, and ideas within the types of experiences of children hidden in private homes, convents, or other locations under a false identity. It looks at as many cases of hidden Jewish children in occupied Poland as possible, and at children they came into contact with.

The "core memory" idea can be applied to the case of the cigarette sellers in Warsaw, as it is one particular group in a specific place. When it comes to interactions between children scattered across Nazi-occupied Poland, however, it is the patterns, specific similarities, or marked differences that I am interested in, as there is no "core memory" for these varying individual experiences. My intention is not to uncover a single narrative of children's interactions in Nazi-occupied Poland, but to interpret what the myriad of interactions can tell us about the role that contact with other children played in children's daily lives, particularly those of Jewish children hiding under a false identity. Second, I aim to use these interactions as a way of understanding another level of Polish-Jewish, or Jewish and non-Jewish, relations in Poland by looking at how ideas such as antisemitism manifested themselves on the child's level. Lastly, I try to complicate categories such as collaborator, victim, resister, perpetrator, and bystander by showing how children's situations do not necessarily fit into one clear category, though it is clear that the vast majority of children in Poland – and indeed occupied Europe as a whole – were in some way victims of a war begun by adults, policies created by adults, and actions and situations largely controlled by adults.

With such a large source base – hundreds of Holocaust memoirs and thousands of testimonies – it was necessary to set parameters for selecting which to access. The main parameter for selecting Holocaust memoirs was location: Poland. The goal was to read as many accounts written by child Holocaust survivors as possible. Memoirs accessed for this project also include those by adults who encountered children, and those who may have been children in the 1930s but were young adults during the

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp*, New York 2010.

war.<sup>10</sup> Because of the vast number of testimonies, however, (USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive contains over 35,000 Holocaust testimonies, and that is only one of many testimony projects) additional criteria are required in the interest of expedience.<sup>11</sup> Most testimonies accessed are for survivors born between 1927 and 1940, with few exceptions, such as that of an older sibling or friend of a younger hidden child. Some testimonies reference interaction only briefly, or suggest it by providing contextual information that indicates that the child had regular contact with other children. For others, contact with other children is a central part of their narrative.<sup>12</sup>

Once obtained, the strategies for examining each testimony or memoir include the following:

1. looking for circumstances, places or situations where interaction may have taken place, such as a school, neighbourhood street, or convent;
2. considering factors that may have influenced interaction in some way, such as age, gender, knowledge of the Polish language or of Catholicism; and
3. finding specific instances of interaction, such as friendship, a chance bullying encounter, or casual play with other children.

Several scholars have used empirical observations of oral history interviews and memoirs in order to develop theories applicable to these memory sources. Henry Greenspan, for instance, looks at multiple testimonies from the same survivor and highlights the nuances present in oral history interviews not visible or audible in a written text. He also points to potential influencers of memory, mentioning the significance of personal connections, background, and experiences outside of the Holocaust in shaping survivors' memory and narrative:

“On one side [...] survivors' voices are rooted in self-images and identifications, both positive and negative [...] carried well before they became 'survivors.' Their self-presentations as a rebel or an ingenué, an unmasker of tradition or its faithful inheritor, derive from relationships and memories of relationships with quite other authorities than their persecutors, and from quite other times. In fact, the whole realm of conflicts and identifications with parents, teachers, and communal tradition comes into play when survivors construct their own role as transmitters of memory. Their voices (like all voices) are an inheritance from other voices; really, from a whole world of voices to which they once belonged.”<sup>13</sup>

10 These include Ben-Zion Gold, *The Life of Jews in Poland Before the Holocaust: A Memoir*, Lincoln 2007; Vladka Meed, *Deckname Vladka: Eine Widerstandskämpferin im Warschauer Ghetto*, Hamburg 1999; Helena Szereszewska, *Memoirs from Occupied Warsaw, 1940–1945*, London 1997; Adina Blady Szwajger, *I Remember Nothing More*, New York 1991 and Josef Ziemian, *The Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square*, New York 1970, among others.

11 Other testimony collections accessed include the Yale Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, the Association of Jewish Refugees testimonies, and various initiatives by or connected to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). While Yad Vashem testimony sources would be incredibly useful for this project, my own resource limitations prevented travel to Israel for dissertation research. I have accessed digital sources where possible, as well as secondary sources by those historians who have had access to Yad Vashem.

12 Compare, for example, the testimony of Dorothy Greenstein – whose testimony included contexts and suggestions of contact with other children, as well as brief mentions of it – with that of Irving Milchberg, leader of the gang of cigarette sellers in Three Crosses Square, for whom contact with other children was central to his wartime experience: VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Testimony of Dorothy Greenstein, Interview 5357 (5 February 2015). For memoirs, consider Nelly Toll, who hid in an apartment and had limited contact with children, and Janina David, who lived among convent girls and with the non-Jewish sons of a rescuer: Nelly Toll, *Behind the Secret Window: A Memoir of a Hidden Childhood During World War II*, New York 2003; Janina David, *A Square of Sky, A Touch of Earth*, London 1992.

13 Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, St. Paul 2010<sup>2</sup>, 25.

Contact with other people, including children, takes on an additional layer through memory, as it can influence how the survivor tells a particular aspect of their story or answers an interviewer's question. Life experiences and knowledge of history since the end of the war could also influence what survivors say or how they convey information. For example, a survivor may have learned since the end of the war exactly what happened to his or her family and friends, or the specific Nazi policies and practices in his or her hometown. Survivors sometimes mention that they have read memoirs, seen a certain feature or documentary film, or read a historian's book. Each of these variables could influence how they describe certain events and contexts. Descriptions in a testimony fifty years after the fact may contain different perceptions, biases, or knowledge than in the years it happened, but the basic nature of the instances, and memories of thoughts and feelings, appear to remain intact.

According to Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, testimony is not "a mode of *statement of*, but rather [...] a mode of *access to*" a truth.<sup>14</sup> The historical information – major events, policies – conveyed in memory sources is context for the stories most significant to this project: day-to-day experiences, thoughts, emotions, and contacts with others. Feeling afraid, frustrated, sad, embarrassed, excited, happy, content, angry, jealous – these were whole ranges of emotions that a Jewish child in hiding could feel at different times during the war. Those emotions can help convey the nature of encounters regardless of how clearly or detailed a witness tells his or her story. For example, a hidden Jewish child may have envied the family a non-Jewish child had, but that non-Jewish child may have resented the attention his or her parents were giving the child who had moved into their home. Alternatively, children might have developed a sibling-like relationship and felt the sting of separation after the war.<sup>15</sup> These emotions were not exclusive to Poland, but Poland's unique combination of factors complicated their meaning in the broader situation at the time: the death penalty as punishment for hiding Jews, the country with the highest number of known rescuers, and a long history of antisemitism.

Some survivors kept their memories boxed up for years, and only brought them into the open after some impetus or catalyst: advancing age, grandchildren asking questions, a testimony project that gives them a direct opportunity to tell their story, meeting another survivor, or even seeing a film or reading a book on the Holocaust. Occasionally, a family member – such as a daughter or son of a survivor – would reach out to a particular organisation such as the USC Shoah Foundation. Thus, many of these sources came into existence 40, 50, 60 years after the events took place. That distance does not, however, diminish the source's value in revealing information about children's contacts; indeed they are often the only sources that can reveal such information.

To illustrate how testimonies can reveal the nature of children's interactions, it is useful to examine cases that highlight the different possible approaches to collecting and interpreting these contacts. The first involves examining what comes as close to a critical mass as possible for one particular case, and the second involves searching for patterns of interaction among multiple scattered cases.

14 Shoshana Felman/Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York 1992, 16.

15 Several first-hand accounts describe such tensions, and not solely in occupied Poland. Other hidden children throughout occupied Europe, as well as the children of rescuers, report a variety of relationships among children living in the home. See for instance the documentary film *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers During World War II*, directed by Aviva Slesin, 2002.

## Approaches to Interpreting Interaction: The Case Study

The Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square were a group of approximately twenty Jewish boys and girls posing as Polish Catholic street children outside of the Warsaw ghetto. Many of them had been smugglers who had lost most or all of their families to horrific ghetto conditions or deportations to Treblinka. Their story, recounted with the most detail in Joseph Ziemian's memoir *The Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square*, can also be reconstructed through additional testimonies and memoirs. The experience of these Jewish children hiding out in the open, selling cigarettes on the streets of an area of Warsaw swarming with Germans, was by no means typical. The variety of interactions the group members had with other children, however, is mostly representative of the range of possible contacts Jewish children under a false identity could have in Nazi-occupied Poland.

Multiple testimonies and memoirs exist in connection with this group. It is through these sources that we learn about specific members of the group, the role they played, and the factors that could influence interaction. One particular example shows how important multiple sources are. The group's leader, a boy named Ignacy Milchberg and nicknamed 'Bull', gave several testimonies after the war. He speaks matter-of-factly – or even somewhat modestly – about his role in the group, saying, for instance, “for whatever reasons I became their coordinator” or “whenever there was a fight between them [...] I had to step in [...] my word was the last [...] somewhere I gained the respect [...] from everybody”.<sup>16</sup> In other sources, however, it becomes even clearer that he was the group's undisputed leader. According to Joseph Ziemian, an adult who was a member of the Jewish underground, and a memoir about his contact with the cigarette sellers, Bull's “arrival at the Three Crosses Square was the start of a new life for the children. Bull had authority. In their eyes he was grown-up and experienced, and he became their leader”.<sup>17</sup> He was also among those in the group who defended the children against bullies, and had significant contacts within the underground and among non-Jews. These contacts included a Polish Catholic smuggler and rescuer, Jan Kostanski. Information about their connection is only accessible through memory sources, and Kostanski was also able to provide insights into the group and their connections. It was Milchberg, for instance, who was instrumental in securing false papers for Jewish family friends of Kostanski who were going into hiding outside of the ghetto, including Kostanski's future wife.<sup>18</sup> All of these sources suggest a clear “core” element: 'Bull' was the leader. He had a significant number of connections outside of the group and served as the main point of contact with adult members of the Jewish underground.

Another instance that receives attention in multiple memoirs and testimonies is the case of Benzion 'Bolus' Fiks, the youngest member of the group, who was in danger of denunciation. Regularly in altercations with Polish Catholic street children, and regularly bullied and called 'Jew', the group realised that they had to figure out a different situation for Bolus, namely hiding completely in a private home and staying away from Three Crosses Square. Being Jewish on the streets of Nazi-occupied Warsaw always presented an imminent danger. Fear and the threat of denunciation were ever-present, even for the close-knit and highly protective children. Ziemian re-

<sup>16</sup> See two of the testimonies of Irving Milchberg: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), L. Papiercollection, RG-50.029\*0024; <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn511633> (25 January 2015); VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Interview 42881 (12 February 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Ziemian, *The Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Kostanski, *Janek: A Gentile in the Warsaw Ghetto*, Melbourne 1998.

counted an incident where the cigarette sellers became concerned about one member of the group, a young boy named Bolus. Some Polish peddlers were starting to make comments and taunts about him, suggesting that he was Jewish based on his physical appearance. Bolus' complexion and hair were darker, which were among the physical features typically viewed as 'Jewish' at that time, and were dangerous characteristics for someone living in the open and trying to pass as a Christian Pole. Polish boys would demand money for him, and on at least one occasion other members of the group stepped in to defend him. Out of concern for Bolus' safety and their own, the other cigarette sellers decided to locate a hiding place for him, as it was too dangerous for Bolus to continue hiding in the open. "The presence of Bolus", wrote Ziemian, "endangered both the child himself and the bigger boys, because rumours were going round the Square that he was a Jew." Once seeds of suspicion were planted, the group erred on the side of caution. They found a place for him with a Polish woman they had trusted in the past, with some help from the Jewish underground. Once Bolus was in hiding, the group asked Ziemian if they could see their friend. When Ziemian hesitated (he did not want Bolus' hiding place inadvertently revealed to Polish observers) the children expressed dismay and slight mistrust, even though they had become more comfortable with him at that point. Milchberg and Klajman also recount this instance in their sources, and Bolus himself gave testimony after the war, describing his problematic situation.<sup>19</sup> They each presented somewhat varying details, such as the person with whom Bolus was placed or the exact circumstances that led to his being hidden, but – as with viewing Milchberg as leader – the 'core' was the same: Bolus was bullied and in danger, and the group of children came together to figure out how best to protect him.

Because the group remained in contact after the war, they also had the opportunity to influence each other's narratives if they have ever discussed their experiences with each other, and can also contribute to the possibility of reconstructing wartime events through testimony by finding a 'core memory'. This situation is somewhat true of the cigarette sellers and those around them. In their testimonies and in Klajman's memoir, Klajman and Milchberg mention each other when they discuss the post-war period. Both men settled in Canada and presumably saw each other occasionally, as suggested by their remaining in regular contact and by the cigarette sellers' reunions over the years. Additionally, despite living on opposite sides of the world, photographs show that Milchberg and Konstanski were in contact and met at least once in the years after the war.<sup>20</sup> For a case study, this overlap in stories can contribute to constructing a more complete narrative. One person might remember an event or conversation, a detail or personal trait that another does not.<sup>21</sup>

19 Accessing testimony for 'Bolus' and some of the other cigarette sellers has proven problematic due to limitations of time, resources, and above all language ability. Several members of the group emigrated to Israel, and their testimonies are therefore in Hebrew, which I unfortunately do not speak. There are, however, ways to access their stories: their testimony notes are available in English through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and voiced-over testimony is available in French through the film *Les petits héros du Ghetto de Varsovie*, directed by Chochana Boukhobza, 2013.

20 See VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Testimony of Janek Kostanski and Irving Milchberg, Interview 42881, (12 February 2015).

21 Another case, for example, is that of four sisters who survived the war and ultimately moved to the same area in the United States very likely discussed their experiences with each other, and there is overlap in testimony content and even emphasis on certain instances, such as one sister going to a camp in her sister's place; see VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Testimonies of the Mandelbaum sisters, including Reva Kibort, Interview 10862-5 (16 February 2015) and Eda Strauss, Interview 10369 (5 March 2015).

Because children also make observations about other children's interactions, not just their own, it is possible to learn about those children who did not leave testimony behind, including those who did not survive. It is through Jack Klajman's testimony and memoir, for example, that we learn about a cigarette seller known as 'Zbyszek', who Ziemian also mentions. His real name was Izaak Grynberg, and he died in 1945. There is therefore little documentation available about him specifically. We learn, however, that Zbyszek was one of the main defenders of the group against bullies, in part due to his large stature and 'Polish' looks (in his case, blond hair).<sup>22</sup> Testimony and memoir enable us to not only learn about the hidden Jewish children who did not survive, but also incorporate their stories into the obtained information about children's contacts with each other.

### Approaches to Interpreting Interaction: Finding Patterns Among Multiple, Diverse Accounts in Testimonies and Memoirs

When looking at hidden Jewish children's encounters throughout Nazi-occupied Poland, there are hundreds of possible accounts to listen to or read. From these myriad accounts, it is possible to try to uncover patterns of interaction. In the following, I compare accounts described in one survivor's memoir and the testimony of another. Both survivors spent much of the war in convents, and were preteen girls from middle-class Jewish families. The first account comes from Janina David's memoir, *A Touch of Earth*. The second is from a testimony given by survivor Silvia Wein Richman. Both recall instances of protecting another child they either knew to be or suspected was Jewish.

Janina David's detailed recollections in her memoir *A Touch of Earth/A Square of Sky* are written in the artistic style of a novel: dialogue, description, a sequential narrative. Writing down memories, as opposed to speaking them aloud in an interview, gives the survivor the opportunity to organise details, sequences of events, and even approximate dialogue in a way they might not be able to do spontaneously. Memoirs are a medium through which survivors can convey thoughts and emotions in more detail, though we cannot hear strain in the voice or choking up, see tears or excitement, hear anger or sadness or laughter. Despite that limitation, they are an incredibly important piece of the puzzle when it comes to hidden Jewish children's interactions. David writes about an encounter with a younger girl who she suspected was Jewish, and how David protected her in a potentially dangerous situation:

"In the corner, her back to the wall, head lowered, stood a copper-haired child. Around her a group pressed in a tight ring. 'What's your name? What did they call you? Ryfka? Sara? Faya?' My insides knotted with anger. The children were of all ages, from the youngest, to the few backward ten-year-olds who still played with the toddlers. It must have been one of them who started the persecution. Why had they not asked me? 'Her name is Franka,' I said, pushing them roughly aside. I took the child's hand and pulled her out of her corner. 'Come on, I'll show you around. And if any of you ever ask her what her name is or was I shall personally beat you black and blue' I promised, before slamming the door."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jack Klajman, *Out of the Ghetto*, London 2000.

<sup>23</sup> David, *A Square of Sky*, 87 f.

David's awareness of possible dangers for the girl she called Franka illustrates both concern for the child's well-being and a cautious navigation of her relationship with the Christian girls in the convent. Through her age and by establishing herself as an authority, she was able to protect herself and extend that protection to a younger child, something the nuns may not have been able to provide, being outside the girls' social hierarchy.

Evidence of Jewish children protecting each other also surfaces in Richman's testimony. Richman encountered a younger child in the convent where she was in hiding: "She was about three or so. And she somehow or another – I don't know, she came up to me and said she was Jewish, and I told her, 'Do not talk about that. Be quiet. It's not your place to talk.' Didn't tell her that I was, but I told her to be quiet." Later, the two girls ended up in a monastery together, where they were the only children – and likely the only girls – among an order of strict monks.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the same feelings that propelled the child to approach Richman in the first place were reflected in her willingness to listen to Richman's authoritative command. Richman prevented the girl from repeating anything about her true identity. Whether the child would have also listened to an adult out of fear, whether she might have rebelled, or whether she would have even approached an adult in the first place to say that she was Jewish, cannot be known, but the fact remains that Richman was able to protect this child by warning her.

By the point in the memoir where David defends Franka, readers are well aware of David's perceptions of her own personality as a child, and her actions involving Franka in the convent are therefore consistent with the person with whom readers have become familiar: a natural leader who has become savvy about the convent children's hierarchy. Richman's account of her protection of a little girl in a convent is less detailed than David's, and we do not know as much about Richman as we do about David, but the ideas and feelings of creating a safe space – an older child being a line of defence for a younger one – are there.

Both David's and Richman's accounts reveal similar information: an older Jewish girl protected a younger Jewish girl from possible denunciation. Both situations are also mainly accessible through personal sources such as diaries, letters, interviews, and memoirs. Through them, we learn about children's awareness of dangers (especially in older children), children's hierarchies in convents, and how some convent children perceived Jews, among other possible interpretations. That both Richman and David were able to recall such instances also speaks to the level of significance these stories may hold in their memories. It shows that, despite the vast differences between a drawn-out memoir with extensive description and a more spontaneous oral history interview punctuated with questions, similar patterns of stories and behaviours can emerge.

That pattern is not exclusive to convents: older children protecting younger children, particularly younger hidden Jewish children, is a common thread in many hiding situations, whether in a convent, private home, or on city streets. The experiences of the Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square also fit this pattern, as with the case of Bolus discussed above. That protection, as many memory sources have shown, included keeping children safe from other children's teasing, bullying, harassment, potential denunciation, and even violence. Such situations demonstrate the significance of the factors that come into play in shaping children's interactions, such as antisemitism, peer pressure, age, and personality, among others.

<sup>24</sup> Silvia Wein Richman testimony, University of South Florida collection, pages 9, 10 of transcript.

## Challenges with Using Memory Sources to Learn About Child Encounters

The first and most obvious challenge to using these sources is the fallibility of memory. However, dates and specific events – potentially the most likely information to fall victim to inaccuracy – are less important for this project than the relationships, thoughts, and emotions that emerge in the stories told in memory sources. That said, each source should of course be approached with the awareness of factors that may have influenced that memory since the end of the war. Another problematic aspect of this memory-source-based approach is finding sources outside of these that can potentially reveal circumstances of interactions among children. Whether a diary or letter from the time or a memoir or testimony after the fact, the main body of evidence for children's encounters comes from first-hand accounts. In order to obtain a fuller picture and place these encounters within the broader history of occupied Poland, additional sources would be helpful.

What sorts of other sources exist that can at least provide contextual information, frameworks, openings, or constraints of interaction? Outside of personal sources, documents that provide more than context for interaction are limited. Sources that can be used to corroborate information, however, are not. For example, a map of wartime Warsaw marking locations of activity (such as smuggling) mentioned in memory sources and in official documents can show where children may or may not have crossed paths with each other. Another possibility is using information on the decrees and laws that shaped and limited interactions and circumstances, both for context and to corroborate the progression of interactions or shifts in them, for instance if contact among particular children decreased after the 1941 law declaring that anyone caught helping a Jew in any way would be sentenced to death.

Other rich sources for context and circumstances include the Oneg Shabbat Archives, created in real time by witnesses living in the Warsaw ghetto, including historian Emmanuel Ringelblum. Also known as the Ringelblum Archive, it contains a large number of first-hand observations: personal sources, but not necessarily memory sources. CENTOS, the Jewish organisation responsible for the care of orphans, and underground documents from organisations such as the ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organisation) or Żegota (the Council for Aid to Jews) are also useful. The International Tracing Service (ITS) is another valuable addition to the source base that can provide broader information about both children's circumstances and specific information about certain children. These documents often do not reveal much about interactions themselves, but can provide insight into characteristics of the child that may have shaped their interactions. At least one child among the cigarette sellers, for example, provided a different birth year to make himself appear a few years younger. That adjustment made him more eligible for emigration with a group of children travelling to North America. The month and day in his birthdate, however, remained the same, which made it easier to confirm that it was in fact the same child. The year change was also corroborated in his USC Shoah Foundation testimony.<sup>25</sup> It is important to remember that these were children who had gotten used to changing their identity for the purpose of survival and in order to give themselves the best possible chance, a level of awareness and savvy that in some cases continued beyond the end of the war. Because of this, searching the ITS using a hidden Jewish child's false Polish Catholic name rather than his or her real name has also proven useful and revealing.

<sup>25</sup> USHMM, ITS Digital Archive, Sub-collection 6.3.2.1: Case files of child tracing branch. See also the VHA, USC Shoah Foundation testimony of Irving Milchberg.

When possible, a way to make the most of the memory sources available includes taking multiple testimonies from the same survivor, an idea that Henry Greenspan promoted. In some cases, both a testimony and a memoir exist for the same person, as is the case with cigarette seller Jack Klajman, author of *Out of the Ghetto*, and Krystyna Chiger, a survivor from Lviv who wrote the memoir *The Girl in the Green Sweater*; both survivors also gave testimony for the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive.<sup>26</sup> Occasionally, there is both an *immediate* post-war testimony and a significantly later testimony, which allows us to see both the perspective of the child and the perspective of the adult looking back on his or her life during the war.<sup>27</sup> Multiple sources from one person can also lead the survivor to repeat a particular narrative. During an interview, some even prefer to read aloud from something they have written.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to what survivors remember, *how* they remember it is also significant. Oral history interviews and memoirs are likewise problematic in that respect. Biases that existed during the war or developed afterwards can influence what they say. That bias, however, can tell us much about children's perceptions of each other, while acknowledging that some of those perceptions may in fact be those of an adult *reflecting* on childhood.

Witnesses are also frequently aware of some of their memory's limitations, and tell stories to the best of their ability to recall what they observed, thought and felt. Survivor testimonies are sprinkled with interjections and caveats such as "I don't remember precisely/exactly", "I don't remember x, but I remember y", "As far as I can remember/recall", or "I was too young to remember",<sup>29</sup> but these also lend the sources a layer of honesty, a sort of disclaimer acknowledging memory's fallibility.

Taking an interview's format into account is also necessary when considering how contacts among children are contextualised or recounted. The USC Shoah Foundation's interviews for the Visual History Archive generally have a specific structure that aims at a particular chronological narrative. Sometimes the most informative testimonies and most skilful interviews, however, involve just enough guidance or direction by an interviewer to make it possible to follow and obtain information, but also enough space for the survivor to shape his or her own narrative. A survey prior to the interview influences the choice of questions during the testimony, and may also provide the survivor with an idea of the types of questions to anticipate, giving him or her a chance to organise their thoughts prior to the interview. Some survivors will take charge themselves, depending perhaps on personality, mood at the time, or degree of rapport with the interviewer. A survivor may say, "Let me go back to that point first", or "I want to finish this part of the story". An interviewer might ask, "Could we go back to x point?", or "Could you talk more about your experiences in x location?".<sup>30</sup> Sometimes an interviewer will prompt them with a question such as, "Did you have any non-Jewish/Polish friends" or "Were you aware

26 Chiger's family is also central to the film *In Darkness*, directed by Agnieszka Holland, 2011.

27 See Joanna B. Michlic: *The Raw Memory of War. Early Postwar Testimonies of Children in Dom Dziecka in Otwock*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 37 (2009) 1, 11-52.

28 Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 17-18.

29 See for example the following testimonies: VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Frieda Aaron, Interview 804 (20 November 2014); VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Barbara Bregman Marlow, Interview 25912 (13 February 2015); VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Irving Milchberg, Interview 42881 (12 February 2015).

30 See the USC Shoah Foundation testimonies of Sol Adler and Jack Klajman, among others, for examples of a survivor directing the course of an interview, or rejecting an interviewer's question in favour of continuing their own line of thought: VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Sol Adler, Interview 47556 (16 December 2014); VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, Jack Klajman, Interview 41715 (2 April 2015).

of/did you experience antisemitism?”. While such questions are certainly helpful to this project, they could lead the survivor in a particular direction of incorporating divisions through the use of certain terms, or framing a narrative through looking at antisemitism, which they may or may not have included otherwise.

Despite the above problems and challenges inherent in using memory sources, they are the most revealing when looking for information about children’s interactions during the Nazi occupation of Poland. They are sources through which it is possible to reconstruct a “core memory” surrounding a particular group of children, and through which it is possible to find patterns of behaviour and patterns of situations for hidden Jewish children in hiding throughout occupied Poland.

Still another insurmountable issue lies at the heart of problems present in memory sources – in fact, probably in any source pertaining to the Holocaust. Eva Romano wrote that her memoir “conveys neither the depth of fear and horror I experienced in the years 1939–1942 nor the desolation and loneliness I felt after the final separation from my parents in 1942”.<sup>31</sup> Despite learning about children’s emotions, relationships, and survival strategies from these sources, it is important to remember that they provide only a glimpse into the nature of their past.

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31 Romano, preface.

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Quotation: Suzanne Swartz, Remembering Interactions, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention.  
Methods, Documentation 3 (2016) 1, 5-19.

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Article

Copy Editor: Miha Tavcar

**S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.**  
ISSN 2408-9192

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S:I.M.O.N. is the semi-annual e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies  
(VWI) published in English and German.