

IF ANY OF YOU WOULD LIKE A COPY OF REMARKABLE TESTIMONY

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If anyone who reads the *Division 51 Bulletin* would like to receive a DVD copy of a remarkable 6-hour video interview with a Holocaust survivor providing first-person testimony about her experiences in Ravensbruck and Auschwitz, I would be happy to send you one.

There is no charge—I'm covering all costs of the DVDs, mailing packets, postage, etc.

Years ago a psychologist (who for reasons of privacy did not with her or her mother's name used in this article) generously sent me a DVD showing her mother being interviewed about her experiences leading up to and surviving the Holocaust.

I asked if I might make a copy of the DVD and send it at no charge to those who requested it. Working with Holocaust survivors in my practice led me to believe that encountering someone's first-hand description of the Holocaust can be a unique, invaluable experience, far more immediate than reading even the best books.

It seems important that personal testimony like this be made as widely accessible as possible. (It is heartening that so many—like the Shoah Foundation—are working to help make that happen.)

In recent years I've circulated this announcement widely and posted it annually to a wide range of internet lists, to APA divisional newsletters, etc. Many of the hundreds of people to whom I've sent the DVD have written me to describe how surprising, moving, and transformative [the survivor's] testimony was for them. I asked 3 of them—Florida psychologist Jim Hord, California psychologist Ann Gassaway, and British Columbia psychologist Raymond Shred—if they'd mind my sharing some of their comments with you, and they generously agreed.

Here is the message that Dr. Jim Hord sent:

The disk is terribly impacting and forceful. I sent for the disk "late", in that I decided not to do so several times before finally asking for a copy.

It is a work of art. She is being interviewed for her story for a formal record, and she recounts it totally from memory. Poignant, honest and straight forward, it flows from her heart. It is a beautiful and forceful rendition, unparalleled in my experience. It is 6 hours long and I have listened to all but the very end of it, between patients. I am grateful to Ken, [the psychologist], and her mother for making it available to me.

Do not miss this opportunity to listen to a section of human history that we are not likely to encounter again in our lifetime. You will not be disappointed.

Here's what Dr. Ann Gassaway wrote:

I received my DVD yesterday. Thank you very much.

I became very absorbed in [the survivor's] traumatic experience during the Holocaust. I watched the complete DVD, with a few breaks, in one sitting. It was inevitable that I would do so. A picture is worth a thousand words it has been said, and to see her person, hear her voice and see her expression, deeply impacted my consciousness and stirred lots of personal feelings. I felt anger, sadness, and at times a sense of helplessness as she described her personal experience—ultimately, though I felt a tremendous sense of gratitude and hope which accompanied [the survivor's] fortitude in withstanding this unbelievable annihilation, done in full daylight of the world, yet denied by most. Like she said, throughout the DVD, "I didn't believe such a thing was happening," and then she mentioned a concept that many of us know well; that we can make ourselves believe different even when the truth is evident. Sometimes the truth is too macabre.

To [the survivor] and her family my deepest gratitude for the privilege of the words and picture that she so humbly shared about her personal experience, and her strength and courage in recalling those memories by talking with us. Thank you.

Dr. Raymond Shred sent the following comments:

I especially want to thank [the survivor] for taking the time to recall and relate her memories of those times.

There were a number of things that struck me about her story. In the beginning, [the survivor] describes her life as young woman in pre-war Poland (I think she was about 18 when Poland was invaded). She remembered the general feeling among the Poles was that Germany was making a lot of noise but that Poland was really in no danger from the Germans because Poland was so strong. Historically, we know that wasn't true. But if a whole nation could

believe that at that time, it kind of makes you wonder what disasters we (i.e., humans) are ignoring today that will bite us in the ass tomorrow or next year. Environment? Public/National security? Human Rights?

The main thing that struck me was the incredible resilience of human beings. [The survivor] described a number of horrific things in her interview -- but only very briefly. Even now 60+ years later she is focused on the positive things. "What a good job we had" at one camp. "how lucky we were . . ." about the fact that they had a bed at another camp. In contrast, to sleeping outside in the snow with no food for 3 days when they first arrived at Ravensbruck because there was no room.

One would think that after 6 years of war and deprivation and increasing restrictive, sadistic, and inhuman treatment, [the survivor] might have allowed herself to be depressed. But that never came through. Instead, she tended to put a really positive spin on seemingly insignificant events.

Another thread that stood out is the importance of social support. [The survivor] talks at length about the mutual support that she and her two sisters provided each other. Also, their bond provided strength for others.

My favourite quote from the 5.5 hours of the interview came when [the survivor] was describing the personal hygiene services provided by the German guards at Auschwitz, "We didn't look forward to the showers so much." That one understatement seems to capture so much about how she framed her experiences.

If any reader of the *Division 51 Bulletin* is interested in my sending you this DVD, please send an email to me at <kspope@kspope.com>. There is no charge—it is completely free. Some may wish to make a donation to one of the Holocaust museums or to a program that provides services to Holocaust survivors.