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## Writing Descendant Generation Memoirs as a Collaborative and Self-Reflexive Process

Peer Reviewed Article

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### Abstract

This paper illustrates the varied and often helpful ways in which memoir-writing, generally thought to be a sole-authorship enterprise, can be enhanced through some form of collaborative process. Over the last two decades, articles in *Second Generation Voices*, the magazine published by the Second Generation Network in the UK, reported on the 'roots' journeys undertaken by children of Holocaust survivors and refugees to places connected with family history. This led David Clark to embark on a book project, resulting in *The Journey Home: Emerging out of the shadow of the past* (2021), jointly edited with Teresa von Sommaruga Howard. After a brief was drawn up about the kind of issues each writer should address, David met with the authors and suggested they work together as a group to enable them to discuss their initial ideas and support each other in the writing process. They rejected this idea, and so it fell on the editors to provide guidance and support. Alternative ways in which the editorial process could have been handled are explored by referring to the literature on Memory Work, as outlined by Haug (1987), Crawford et al (1992) and Postmemory (Hirsch 2012). Other approaches that encourage self-reflexivity are examined, including the use of creative writing workshops.

### Keywords

Second Generation, Memory Work, Memoir, Editing, Collaborative, Postmemory

## Setting the scene

Commenting on Jewish “roots” tourism, anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (1992) described organised tours undertaken by American Jews to Eastern Europe as the “rites of the tribe”. Such journeys include visits to former Jewish quarters, ghettos, cemeteries and concentration camps, with evening discussions built in for participants to share their feelings and discuss what they have seen.

This paper reflects on a recently published anthology of similar journeys to places connected with family history, *The Journey Home: Emerging out of the shadow of the past* (2021), jointly edited by David Clark and Teresa von Sommaruga Howard. Most of these visits were independently arranged, and countries visited included Germany and Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia and Romania.

Over the last two decades, articles in *Second Generation Voices*, the magazine published by the Second Generation Network in the UK, brought more awareness of the significance of these roots’ journeys for children of Holocaust survivors and refugees. Recognising the wider relevance of this topic, David presented a paper at a Holocaust conference in Ukraine in 2019 and decided to embark on a book project.

The timing of this project is significant. It joins a recent flourishing of creative talent in fiction and non-fiction work, visual art and film, exploring the impact of this history on descendant generations at a time when few of the first generation of Holocaust survivors are still with us. David also felt that his own disrupted life story needed to be told; this book project gave him that opportunity.

He was born in London in 1946, a child of refugees. Both his parents were Jewish and born in Berlin but from different backgrounds. His father, Ralph, had an Austrian mother and an English father. Ralph’s mother was arrested in early 1933 as a leading member of the women’s section of the German Communist Party and given 24 hours to leave the country with her British husband and ten-year-old son. Ralph did well at his English school and obtained a scholarship to study at Cambridge.

David’s mother, Resi, from an assimilated German-Jewish family, came to England as a teenager on the Kindertransport in 1939, along with some 10,000 other unaccompanied children who were allowed into Britain. She was badly treated as a domestic and ran away as soon as she could, fending for herself for the duration of the war. Resi and Ralph met at a dance and got married at war’s end. They never quite settled down in London or anywhere else.

The family moved from London to Australia in 1949 for three years, then Italy for seven years, and Austria for three years. This repeated uprooting led David to a constant search for a place of belonging and secure identity. He studied Anthropology in Canada and East Africa, then returned to Britain, where he worked on research projects on the employment and housing of minorities before teaching tourism management. He joined Second Generation Network and later *Exiled Writers Ink*, a magazine devoted to promoting the work of contemporary refugee and expatriate writers in Britain. Such connections provided him with important reference points for making sense of his own life trajectory.

## Gathering a Group of Willing Writers

In 2019, David called a meeting of members of Second Generation Network who had already written about their journeys. David drew up a brief about the kind of issues he thought each writer should address, which included:

1. The importance and impact of treading on the same ground as their parents or grandparents had.
2. Encounters made along the way, what did that feel like?
3. Acts to commemorate or memorialise on the spot.

A rough timetable was suggested, a length of up to 5000 words, and the style of writing should be easy to read and accessible. As word of mouth was spreading the news, more people beyond our initial group agreed to write a chapter. Ultimately, we had twenty contributing authors, including the two editors.

## **Finding a Co-editor**

This process took some time. Although she had considerable experience in facilitating second generation groups, the person David first approached was not sure she could devote enough time to the project, as she was writing her own book about second generation. She suggested asking the contributing authors to form themselves into groups of three or four, where they could discuss their initial ideas to support each other in their writing.

David put this idea to the group at their second meeting, but as many of them felt they did not know each other well enough, the idea was rejected. Instead, David suggested they could circulate their initial draft to anybody they felt comfortable with to get some feedback.

The next person David approached was Teresa. We belong to the same synagogue as well as the Second Generation Network. Teresa, with a German-Jewish father and an English mother, has led dialogue groups in Germany, in conflict zones in Europe and the Middle East, and second generation workshops in New Zealand, where she was raised. Our skills neatly complement each other. David comes from an anthropological and sociological background. Teresa trained first as an architect and then as a group analyst. We then had to sort out how we would work together. Early in 2020, we were able to meet in person, but after the imposition of the Covid lockdown, we communicated via Zoom.

Our contributing authors had very different writing experiences. For most, this was their first attempt at writing an autobiographical memoir. So, we decided that both editors would read every draft and agree on comments to pass on to the authors. David was particularly keen for the chapters to capture the reader's attention and imagination. He was looking for clarity in the storyline, clear delineation of characters, as well as elements of local colour to render the story more vivid. Teresa was more insistent on encouraging authors to describe and reflect on their emotional experience along their journey and what it meant to them in retrospect. Many of our authors were much more comfortable presenting factual accounts, and some were initially resistant to expressing their own thoughts and feelings.

It usually took three drafts, sometimes four, before the co-editors were satisfied with their writing, so the editing process proved to be much more exacting than either of us anticipated. The result exceeded expectations. Many of the writers thanked us after publication; they were pleased and delighted that they had stuck through it all.

## **A Taster of Some of the Chapters**

A third of the chapters entailed accounts of journeys undertaken with a survivor or refugee parent, going back to places where the parent had spent their childhood.

An organised trip by the Association for Jewish Refugees (AJR) enabled Janet to visit Berlin with her mother. The ambivalence felt by the first generation is palpable in her mother's reactions. She became all excited at seeing some of the sites connected with visiting places that held dear

memories, such as the Tiergarten and the Zoo, shopping on Kurfürstendamm or picnicking on the shores of Lake Wannsee. Yet being at a Holocaust site, Wannsee House, for example, proved too painful for her. She could only be physically present by staring into the distance to absent herself emotionally.

For the second generation accompanying a parent to their hometown, a new sense of the past emerged. Seeing these places through the lenses of their parents' reactions and recollections on the spot allowed a new reality to surface and new meaning to be constructed.

Just under a third of such journeys were undertaken in connection with a commemorative event sometime after the death of the survivor or refugee parent. Gina, whose mother came to Britain in 1939 as an unaccompanied child on the Kindertransport, decided to have *Stolpersteine*, small ten-centimetre square brass plates laid in pavements, placed outside the former home of her grandparents in Germany in a small village north of Frankfurt, bearing the names and relevant dates of her relatives. (There are about 100,000 such *Stolpersteine* placed in 26 countries in Europe, crafted by the artist Gunter Demnig). On the day of the ceremony, the pastor opened the proceedings, a cousin read the Jewish memorial service, and Gina read out her tribute to her murdered relatives. She writes,

The hall was full. Taking several deep breaths, I made it through the four pages of German. Returning to my seat I noticed that many people in the audience were crying. The mayor and the *Ortsvorsteher*, [Head of Village Council] made speeches. The pastor closed with a prayer. I had a strong sense of communal warmth and sorrow uniting all those present (Burgess Winning, 2011: 7-8).

Such ceremonies link both the personal and the public past, affirming family history while placing them squarely within the setting of recorded public history.

Another form of commemoration occurs without erecting plaques or monuments. The German *Denk Mal am Ort* [Commemoration on Site] ceremony is arranged by local neighbourhood groups, with speeches and testimonies in the public space just outside the former homes of those deported. Merilyn was asked to talk about her mother's family at the event in Berlin in 2018:

There were about thirty people listening in the courtyard, many, though not all, who lived in one of the apartments around the courtyard. Afterwards, there was a queue to speak to me. They wanted to tell me the stories of their parents under Nazism, of the relatives, some who had stood up to the Nazis and been killed, some who had fought and been killed, and how they now felt about the losses and contradictions of it all. It was as if I was healing their historic wounds. But what they did not know was that they were healing mine. It is almost the only time I have felt 'at home' (Moos 2021: 218-219).

Just over a third of these journeys were undertaken without a parent and without any formal commemorative event.

Zuzana took her parents' written memoirs with her on a trip to Auschwitz to retrace their steps and writes:

We took out the candles: two yellow ones for my grandparents who died in Birkenau of starvation and disease, and a white one for (uncle) Max who was only 24 years old when he was murdered. I started saying my own version of Kaddish (the mourners' prayer) as I did not know the real thing and prayed for them all, all dead now including my parents, all having suffered tortures physical and mental. A cage of sadness and grief came down on me. I started to cry and realised that this was the very first time, at the age of 56, that I was able to cry for my murdered relatives and for my parents' suffering, as well as for

my own sorrow at having had my grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins stolen from me (Crouch 2021: 174).

## Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

Kestenberg (1972) reported on the growing recognition that the Holocaust experiences of the first generation are transmitted to the second generation. Those growing up with parents who are silently suffering yet denying what they had seen and felt are themselves traumatised as a result. Such children grow up having to deal with words of minimisation accompanied by an emotional overload that signalled the opposite. In her workshops for second generation, Teresa often heard, “They got out in time”, referring to parents who left in the thirties. The implication is that nothing traumatising happened to them. Children of camp survivors were often told nothing. It is this silence alongside frightening emotional expression that is so confusing to a growing child. The stories in *The Journey Home* describe what it is like growing up in such an atmosphere of expressed yet denied anguish, often leading to a life-long search of trying to make sense of why their family was so different to others. Attempts to be what is often referred to as “normal” often covered attempts to deny one’s origins, as both generations sought to fit in with the prevailing cultural norms of the new country.

The question often is, “What is the mechanism that transmits the trauma of the first generation on to the next?” Jill Salberg (2015: 23-24) writes,

Children are constantly observing their parents’ gestures and affects, absorbing their parents’ conscious and unconscious minds. In the shifting registers of attunement and misattunement, children adjust and adapt to the emotional presence and absence of their caregivers/parents, always searching for attachment. These searches begin at birth and occur before there are words, when there are gazes, stares, sounds, and touch—as well as the absence of these. [...] To find some level of attachment and soothing second-generation children learn to read their parents’ emotional states very carefully. Often the most intense bond could only be generated from the traumatised and deeply buried yet emotionally alive part of the parent.

Schlant (1999: 14) quotes Eric Santner, a German film and literature scholar who suggests that “the second generation inherited not only the unmourned traumas of the parents but also the psychic structures that impeded mourning in the older generation in the first place”.

## Embodying Attachment to Place, Grief and Mourning

Each of our contributing authors describes how the past was brought into the present through a performative act that linked genealogy with place. They set off in search of a past that seemed nebulous and out-of-reach at first, but actually being there where their ancestors had lived made a big impression on them.

Walking through the main door of apartment blocks where parents or grandparents had once lived, climbing the same staircases, walking on the same pavements, sitting by the same courtyard fountain where a parent had played as a child. Throughout these journeys, countless instances of performative actions helped to weave together a sense of place that was closely connected to those relatives who had lived or died there.

Some of our contributors found they were quite adept at creating their own rituals to help them solidify that sense of connection between places, ancestors and themselves. Diti, in her chapter, describes how it became possible to physically embody the connection with her great grandmother and the family home in Oradea:

In spite of the past  
You are here. I  
Walk your way  
From the shop to your home  
From your home to your shop  
Counting one hundred  
From edge to edge  
Paving the memory  
By my steps.

The house still stands in its glamour.  
The big two Stars of David in its gates.

For others, more scripted rituals also had an impact that they had not fully anticipated. Whether it was through laying a *Stolperstein*, lighting a memorial candle, or reciting the *Kaddish* [the mourners' prayer], they found it drew them much closer to their 'lost family'.

Such rituals took on further emotional force when undertaken as part of a commemorative event in which local residents participated, as in the cases presented by Gina and Marilyn above. This strengthened a sense of connection, however tenuous, with the present-day local community as well, so that attachment to place took on a new quality altogether.

## Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch (2012) describes postmemory as an imaginative and creative process. In the case of the contributing authors to our anthology, viewing the physical buildings or the places where they once stood is not simply to gaze on a place but to superimpose onto the site something that is unseen, requiring descendants to link fragments of what has been passed down through family stories, photographs and research on to the scene in front of them.

What Hirsch explores in greater depth is how the second generation 'reworks' such post-memory to communicate their experience of transgenerational trauma to a wider audience or readership. Hirsch refers to Jan Assman's (1997) distinction between communicative and cultural memory. Aleida Assman (2010) further subdivides communicative memory into individual and social memory, in which memories are linked between individuals, most often within families or those who share similar experiences. Cultural memory refers to a greater degree of institutionalised and often hegemonic memory in traditional archives, books, rituals, commemorations and performances.

What intrigues Hirsch is how second-generation artists, photographers and writers seek to bridge the gap between the more 'familial' communicative memory and the wider collective 'cultural memory'. Hirsch (2012:15) likens such attempts to the feminist wave in art, writing and scholarship, 'which offered a means to uncover and to restore experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive'. Similar approaches were adopted in Britain in the 1970s by the History Workshop Movement, with its emphasis on oral histories, focusing on working class histories, as well as that of women and children (Samuel 1981).

Hirsch states that such approaches 'open a space for the consideration of affect, embodiment, privacy and intimacy as concerns of history and they shift our attention to the minute events of daily life' (2012: 16). In her book, Hirsch documents the way in which different Jewish artists and writers have sought to reach out to wider audiences by blurring the boundary between familial memory and wider cultural memory (2012: 97).



Second-generation artists and writers often find a way of bringing a new twist or angle to their familial stories, which questions preconceived notions and assumptions and brings a new perspective to such stories. Such approaches may enable them to insert their own stories and identities into the 'frame' and so help them to find their own 'voice' in the process.

## Memory Work as a Sociological Method

Within the sociological literature on collaborative autobiography, Lapadat et al (2010) note that Memory Work as a qualitative research approach was initially developed in Germany by Frigga Haug (1987) as a feminist sociological method to combine oral history with a more analytical approach. This was further elaborated in Australia for a women's study group that devised several stages in the process (Crawford et al 1992). Phase one consisted of each member in the group writing down personal memories elicited by chosen trigger phrases or themes, making sure to write descriptively and avoiding interpretation or evaluation.

Phase two consisted of reading each piece aloud, followed by a preliminary discussion, drawing on the group's cultural and theoretical knowledge. In this way, phase two allows each person to respond to the others and reflect on their memories and how they shaped their identity (Crawford et al 1992: 40). It is at this stage that Crawford introduced a greater emphasis on examining the emotions that emerged at the time of the memory and reflecting on its aftermath. Hirsch similarly reflects on how feminist research at the time placed importance on issues concerning affect, embodiment, privacy, intimacy, and the minutia of daily life (Hirsch 2012: 16).

It is in phase two that a shift can take place between personal and familial memory, on the one hand, towards a more expansive memory field on the other that then finds resonance with other individuals and communities. Hirsch describes this as a shift from familial memory to 'affiliative memory' (Hirsch 2012: 97).

Phase three of Memory Work involved one person within the group examining the revised written material and, after further group discussion, adding an individual piece of work, providing further theorisation.

In terms of our own anthology, in the absence of any group work, it fell upon the editors to ensure that each chapter would contain the element of reflexivity found in the second phase of Memory Work. When we received initial drafts from our contributing authors, all but two needed considerable changes. The two that passed muster first-time round were written by authors who had already published an autobiographical work (Moos 2010; Wichtel 2017). They had already done the 'Memory Work', and there was little that the editors could add.

Many first drafts focused heavily on the parental survivor or refugee story and on factual travelogues, corresponding to the first phase of Memory Work. As editors, we wanted them to focus more on themselves, the emotions they had lived with all their lives and how the journey changed how they saw themselves and their parents.

Teresa, referring to the intergenerational transmission of trauma, writes in the epilogue:

... the editorial process of encouraging authors to think more deeply and more emotionally about their experience as children of their parents, illustrated the consequences of catastrophe and subsequent forced physical displacement, tightly held secrets and silences, as well as the emotional confusion that almost all had to live with...To write these chapters, many of our authors found themselves having to overcome a life-long tendency, learnt from their parents, of silencing their own thoughts and emotions. It took time and a lot of soul-

searching to relieve the silences (Clark and von Sommaruga Howard 2021: 285-286).

## Online Approaches to Memory Work

David was involved at the time in another anthology on the second generation. This was *Researchers Remember, Research as an Arena of Memory Among Descendants of Holocaust Survivors*, co-edited by Baumel-Schwartz and Refael (2021) that focused on how being a descendant of a Holocaust survivor led to the adoption of a research career.

As a contributing author to the *Researchers Remember* project, David attended online workshops spread over a year. In the first workshop, participants were asked to introduce themselves, their backgrounds and what they expected from the writing process. Judith Baumel-Schwartz explained some ground rules and made suggestions about how we might organise our writing. In the second workshop, participants were given the task of talking about Jewish objects in the home where they grew up. The third workshop was devoted to talking about the first time they became aware of the Holocaust. In the fourth workshop, they were asked to read a few paragraphs from their chapter. Later workshops were devoted to work in progress and any stumbling blocks encountered.

Baumel-Schwartz writes in *Researchers Remember*,

As the writing process continued, group discussions become even more charged with meaning. (2021: 21).

Such an approach adopted techniques similar to Memory Work by using trigger phrases to start a discussion and encourage further reflection and reflexivity. Yet, it did not aim for the group to formulate any theoretical analysis; this was left solely to the co-editors to develop.

## Creative Writing Workshops

David also joined a six-week writing workshop to help him write his chapter in *The Journey Home* anthology. This was arranged by Second Generation Network specifically for those seeking to write about their family history. It was led by Nick Barlay, an author of several novels, who had also written about his own family history, *Scattered Ghosts, one family's survival through war, Holocaust and revolution* (2013).

At the same time, three other writers for *The Journey Home* anthology joined the same workshop. Nick Barlay first introduced a topic, and the following week, we would read what we had written in response. Everyone would then comment on our writing. Invariably, Nick would offer very insightful and sensitive comments, giving us much encouragement and food for thought. The workshop helped us to think about structure and the importance of openings, people in the story (characterisation and voices), settings and places, dramatic units and dialogue, shape and overall organisation.

It also gave those of us involved in *The Journey Home* a chance to get to know each other better. This model might not have been as analytically rigorous an approach as suggested by the Memory Work method, but it helped us write our chapters more easily.

## Anthologies: The Editor-Author Relationship

Our initial cohort of writers resisted the idea of working together in a group. By default, the co-editors resorted to a much heavier reliance on the editorial process to encourage and foster the switch from phase one of Memory Work, which relies on more factual and descriptive accounts,



towards the kind of reflective and reflexive accounts that we were encouraging and typical of phase two.

As we worked through several drafts, it dawned on our writers that they were expected to do much more emotional work than they had initially thought. To write, they found they had to face their own thoughts and emotions instead of those of their parents. More often than not, this process was heartily resisted, and a great deal of tact and sensitivity was required to keep them on board.

Fortunately, the two co-editors already had experience providing support to members of the second generation and refugee groups, people in conflict situations, as well as writers and students whose first language was not English.

As a group analyst, Teresa has been involved for decades in conducting second generation groups and intergroup dialogue in Germany, the Middle East and the Balkans. Much of this work entails establishing a culture that enables people to speak about their hearts and minds and ease pervasive silences and erasures.

Teresa proved very skilful in observing where authors could be encouraged to discover what they felt instead of what their parents felt. Her experience of conducting groups has led her to expect that most people find it difficult to openly acknowledge their own thoughts and feelings as we live in a society where there are cultural imperatives that resist hearing about pain and suffering, especially extreme pain and suffering.

David's skills lay in a different direction. He had long been involved in the organisation of Second Generation Network and had met half the contributing authors prior to the book project. David had been involved for a similar period with a creative writing group in London devoted to encouraging and supporting exiled and refugee writers. He had also been on the editorial committee of *Jewish Renaissance*, an arts and culture magazine based in London. This gave David a keen sense of what makes a piece of writing compelling and attractive to a wider audience while at the same time communicating important cultural nuances.

While editing *The Journey Home*, we often found ourselves suggesting that writers exclude detailed travelogues or reported history but instead focus on describing their emotional reactions to what had happened both in the past and in the present. This was often a tricky process as our suggestions would many times evoke very strong reactions of anger and distress.

When Monica went to Riga to find out what had happened to her father's relatives during the Holocaust, she discovered that 150 of them had been murdered during the liquidation of the Riga ghetto in 1941. On her mother's side, Monica also had to struggle with the knowledge that her grandfather, whom she had known in childhood as a loving grandfather, had, in fact, been a member of the *Wehrmacht* (German army) and the Nazi party. It was something that Monica had never previously talked about in the twenty years that David had known her (we had both joined the Second Generation Network committee at the same time).

Not surprisingly, Monica's first draft for the anthology was heavily laden with the factual horrors of what had happened in 1941 to her relatives. David explained that that was not the purpose set out for the anthology, and we wanted something which focused on her journey of discovering that story and how it had impacted her. By her second draft, Monica was able to describe her feelings of horror, shock and pain on first discovering the 150 names of her relatives displayed in the Riga Ghetto Museum. It helped her to face the enormity of that loss. She was also ready to describe her grandfather's role in the war and her mixed emotions. David's prompt had given her the green light for that story to emerge, but the sheer weight and strength of emotions that poured onto the

page is stunning; the result is a beautifully written and moving account of her inner journey facing up to an extremely painful family past.

Zuzana grew up in postwar-communist Czechoslovakia. She was a university student in Prague when the Soviets invaded during the Spring Revolution in 1968, and so decided to leave for Britain. Her first draft focused squarely on her parents' survival story, their return to Prague upon liberation, and her use of her parents' memoirs to retrace their steps to Auschwitz and her mother's liberation from Bergen Belsen. It is a fascinating story in itself, but upon receiving Zuzana's first draft, David was also intrigued by her upbringing in communist Czechoslovakia. He noticed that she had not written a word about it. David, feeling it might make a unique contribution to the anthology as no one else amongst the contributors had had such an experience, wrote asking her about it, but he heard nothing back from Zuzana. After some six months, David wrote back asking her about her progress; no response. As the deadline for the finished manuscript was approaching, he wrote to her again, and she responded that she was in the process of completing the chapter. When it arrived, she had added a long paragraph on going back to Prague in recent years, post-communism, school reunions with her erstwhile Jewish classmates, reminiscing about their childhood in communist times and having a good laugh about it, all of them now scattered and living in different parts of the globe.

After the book was published, Zuzana wrote to David saying how glad she was that she had added those bits about her upbringing in Czechoslovakia. She had been reluctant at first, as she did not see their relevance, but having read the published book, she could now see how important it was to tell the whole story.

Subsequently, Marilyn wrote:

I was delighted to be approached by David and Teresa to write about what it was like to 'journey home'. It encouraged me to put into words incoherent and unexpressed half-understood feelings about my visits to Berlin and Munich. Confronting the pain of the past is something those of us from this second generation often find too emotionally painful, but this book's autobiographical form encouraged me to acknowledge and articulate those feelings.

Oliver wrote:

Yes, it's really like writing memoirs – writing an autobiography. The big questions are, what does one include, what can be left out (is redundant or repetitive), and how is it best expressed. The editors seemed to have a fine handle in guiding us (at least me) through those-questions.

## **Another Glimpse of the Editor-Author Relationship for Anthologies**

The previous section has highlighted two key elements that help smooth the anthologies' editor-author relationship.

First, what special skills do the editor or co-editors bring to the relationship? In any academic anthology, purely academic skills and knowledge are key. Also, some experience in editing, whether in the academic field or in creative writing, is essential. Both Teresa and David were experienced in their own academic fields and had substantial editing experience. But when writing an autobiography or memoir, especially where trauma is involved, support for the writing process becomes critical. It need not necessarily come from the editors themselves, but it does require the editor(s) to be keenly attuned to when and how such support might be needed.

There are a number of models for nurturing and accessing support. We have referred to the Memory Work model, as well as the workshops led by Baumel-Schwartz in the Researchers Remember project and the creative writing workshop led by Nick Barlay.

There is another anthology on a similar theme, *The Ones Who Remember, Second Generation Voices of the Holocaust*, edited by Rita Benn, Julie Goldstein Ellis, Joy Wolfe Ensor and Ruth Wade (2022), with a different genesis. It arose from a prior initiative within a synagogue in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a special Holocaust Memorial Day service where the stories of survivor parents of members of the community would feature. The first of these services was held in 2004 and soon became an annual event, leading to the creation of a dedicated group, *Generations After*, tasked with organising the event. The editors write,

To plan our services, we gathered in each other's homes around abundant food, hugs, laughter, and sometimes tears. Our conversations moved organically from sharing what was happening in our own lives to telling our parents' stories to identifying a connecting theme that gave the annual memorial observances their own unique emphases, such as suffering, resistance, forgiveness and grace. We then wove together our individual recollections with prayer and music (2022: xiv).

While the composition of the Generation After group changed over time, a core group maintained continuity and eventually decided to collate some of the stories gathered over the years into an anthology. A draft manuscript was produced and then handed over to a professional editor for comments before submitting to a publisher. The group was stunned by the response they received; the professional editor asked why the contributing authors were not in the stories they had written but had focused exclusively on the parents' survival story. They needed to take a deeper dive and share more about their own stories and lives, not just that of their parents'.

It is a tribute to the strength of feeling within the group, goodwill and common purpose that all contributing authors agreed to carry on with the project, taking into account the recommendations put to them. Each author also undertook to continue working with the same external editor at their own expense to incorporate their own lived experience of being second generation.

Many of the contributing authors found the task of placing themselves into the frame of what they were writing incredibly hard. They were helped in this by the informal support they received from their fellow writers while also being able to rely on the continued support of the four editors of the anthology.

Two of the book's editors were clinical psychologists and therapists by training; another editor had been a training and development executive and, upon retirement, volunteered at the Florida Holocaust Museum as a speaker and a guide.

The editors eschewed reliance on group work as they wanted each chapter to be distinct and did not wish to steer the authors in any particular direction. They also felt they had the right background and expertise to support their contributing authors on a one-to-one basis, propping up some of them when required.

It has to be said, though, that this placed quite a heavy responsibility on the editors themselves, especially when it came to helping the authors incorporate their perspectives and emotions into their respective chapters.

## The Collaborative Process Within the Editorial Team

While the American anthology, *The Ones Who Remember*, had four co-editors, *The Journey Home* anthology only had two, dealing with eighteen other contributing authors. Neither of us had fully anticipated the load on the co-editors of *The Journey Home*. Rather than dividing up the contributors between us, we felt it best to both read each draft as it came in, comment on it and decide on a joint approach before sending our comments back to its author. We constantly consulted with each other on how to respond to each draft and phrase our response. This proved to be quite an arduous task, as most chapters went through three drafts, sometimes four, occasionally even more.

David knew authors quite well, mostly through his involvement with the Second Generation Network. He became the primary liaison person, while Teresa remained the primary contact for those authors based in New Zealand whom she knew through her ongoing visits and work there. Sometimes, it happened that particular authors also received further support and encouragement from both editors when we responded to particular issues where we had different expertise to offer. Teresa was able to give considerable support to Tina when it came to emotional issues, while David, who had encountered Tina online in the writing workshop led by Nick Barlay, offered her encouragement to keep up her writing beyond the anthology project, based on what she had contributed to the class. David was also able to encourage Oliver, back in New Zealand, and whom David had not met, to elaborate a bit further on his experiences in Berlin and in Africa, pointing out where Oliver's account might benefit from adding just a few more details.

The two editors made a special point of communicating comments to each draft in our joint names. Also, we were constantly updating each other on any communication with the contributing authors. What this entailed was a very close working relationship between the two editors, involving a great deal of trust in each other, built up over a friendship of more than twenty years.

## Concluding Remarks

This paper has illustrated how memoir writing can be enhanced through collaborative interaction. There are different methods for encouraging collaboration, but this paper is limited to reporting on establishing a safe enough context for memoirs to be written by people impacted by the transmission of trauma involving persecution and physical displacement from the parental home country. Our paper focuses especially on trauma related to persecution under Nazi rule, though our findings also have much wider implications for displaced people in any given time period or location.

Kestenberg (1972) reported on how the trauma caused by the Holocaust experiences of the first generation is transmitted to the second generation. In many cases, the postwar generation was being traumatised by growing up with parents who were silently suffering yet denying what they had seen and felt. Often these journeys were triggered by the loss of a parent, a serious illness, or the discovery of hitherto hidden family documents or family albums and undertaken as a means of coming to terms with a troubling past that had often haunted them. For our contributing authors, just being where their ancestors had lived proved an emotional experience. Feelings of connection with their history were further enhanced through ceremony or ritual, whether by laying a *Stolperstein*, lighting a memorial candle, or reciting the *Kaddish* [the mourners' prayer]. For all the authors, the experience was transformative and part of a healing process, enabling the expression of grief and mourning for lost relatives whom they had never known.

Yet, the physical journey proved to be only part of the healing process. Putting their accounts into writing brought a new dimension, awareness of their emotional journeys. It required a greater

degree of reflection and self-reflexivity, on the one hand, and the willingness to communicate with others beyond their immediate family, on the other.

We have discussed two distinctive approaches to helping writers and artists in such endeavours: Memory Work, initially developed by Haug (1987) and elaborated by Craford et al. (1992), and postmemory (Hirsch 2012). Phase one of Memory Work involved writing down individual recollections of past experiences with an emphasis on factual accounts. In phase two, these recollections were read out and commented upon by the rest of the group, bringing further contextualisation and some theoretical input, which further emphasised the emotional impact of their experiences. Hirsch (2012) explores the ways in which Jewish writers and artists in recent decades sought to bridge the gap between familial memory and collective cultural memory by promoting affiliative memory, which resonated with audiences and readers from a broader social and cultural background. Placing the artist or writer in the frame of the narrative or artwork itself also allowed for that element of self-reflexivity encountered in phase two of Memory Work.

In the absence of group work for all the contributing authors to *The Journey Home*, it really fell upon the two co-editors to encourage and support the authors in their attempts to bridge the gap between familial and collective cultural memory and place themselves squarely in the frame of their own piece of writing. This supportive work entailed a closer collaborative approach in the writing process than is usually found in anthologies precisely because it involved overcoming some of the barriers to expressing individual thoughts and feelings that were ingrained in the transmission of intergenerational trauma.

When writing memoirs connected with family history, it is important to place them in a wider time frame to contextualise family fragments that the second generation often grows up with. Growing up with tales of past family lives handed down the generations often leaves many unanswered questions. Never quite knowing one's origins, where one belongs or how one fits into the surrounding society establishes existential anxieties for many in descendent generations. A young adult may pursue some of these questions, but they often are left to a later stage in life, when ageing or dying parents may bring them to the fore again. For some, as mourning for what was shattered forever in the lives of the parent or grandparental generation, this might entail a 'journey home'. It is often transformative, bringing new insights, but not always. Some journeys lead to a dead-end or are forever delayed, but for others, it brings new perspectives and some healing. And writing about it afterwards can bring with it further insight, understanding and healing.

## Postscript

The book was published at the end of December 2021. By January, all the authors had received their digital copies and had begun to read each other's chapters. They were so amazed that they arranged Zoom meetings so they could meet each other, talk, and discover what the writing experience had been like for everyone else.

As editors, we felt our work had been done. We were happy to leave it up to the eighteen other authors to organise the online meetings (many live in different parts of Britain, one in Israel and two in New Zealand). They meet on a Sunday morning once every six or seven weeks. Now, through the ongoing process of talking to each other, they are beginning to learn a lot more from each other about how much of their family's emotional trauma each of them is holding and carrying.

Gina writes about the value of the post-publication Zoom meetings:

I have gained a lot from our authors' discussions. In each session there is at least one (often more) moment where I identify with what others express. As



you may recall, I had a real lightbulb moment back in the summer where I suddenly realised/understood why I had had two nights of absolutely no sleep and great digestive turmoil, on what I calculated had been the 80th anniversary of the deportation of my grandparents and uncle, which I had remembered in advance but forgotten on the actual days - but obviously deep down my body or subconscious remembered. Despite the many differences, it makes a big difference speaking to people who share so much.

Oliver writes:

As a purely personal assessment I see our sessions as great opportunity for each of us to share what's going on in our lives as related to our backgrounds. On the whole, though, I've gained a heap of insight by corresponding on an individual basis with some of the other authors, asking them questions on issues that weren't covered in their chapters.

These Zoom meetings have taken place for just over a year, and the group has decided to continue meeting in this way, perhaps less frequently, four or five times a year, instead of the current six-week interval between meetings. It turns out that constructing a narrative for this book was, and continues to be, a healing process in itself; this inner journey and healing is a life-long process.

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