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## 3. The Third Generation

### 3.1 On the Cusp of Generational Consciousness: What does the Third Generation Think?

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### 3.2 Third Generation Holocaust Workshops and Theatrical Play (3GH) A work in progress...

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### 3.1 On the Cusp of Generational Consciousness: What does the Third Generation Think?

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How do we think about what we think we know about the Holocaust? Whether we are survivors, second or third generation, we are all influenced by movies like *Schindler's List*, books by Elie Wiesel, school-based journeys which take in the *March of the Living*, communal commemoration on *Yom Hashoa*, and other experiences that all add to what we directly experience and hear from survivor mothers and fathers, relatives and friends.

According to psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, each generation develops its own 'generational consciousness' which clearly defines and differentiates ones' own generation from older and younger ones. When Gen Nexters, known for their skilled multitasking, social tolerance, keen networkers and carers of the environment, emerge from that deep shadow the Holocaust has cast (on Jews and non-Jews alike), traditional forms of religious, social, and political engagement take on a pressing additional dimension: how to think about negotiating what they know about the impact of the Holocaust on their identities. As 3rd generation descendents, the Jewish third generation carries a deep secret as an added burden.

Over the years 'Holocaust survivors' have developed very effective ways to avoid sharing the 'pain' they had endured. To cope with facing the demands of building new lives, often after migration, raising families alongside memories of their extreme ordeals they needed to insulate their pain simply in order to survive. Many survivors did not speak of the details of what they lived through to their children, and only

opened up, partially if at all, when they spoke to their grandchildren often as part of their 'Roots' school project.

In the mind of a child 'silences' often equate to 'secrets'. If something is a secret, then a child will learn not to ask – after all a child will eventually learn that you will not get an answer, even if you knew what to ask which often they did not. And so for decades, Holocaust families lived by the rule that became known both in the wider culture and in family communication as the 'conspiracy of silence' about which much has been written.

However, the survivor's wish to protect their children, the second generation, in silence meant that when they in turn became parents, their model of parenting was based on their own parent's 'silencing' of pain. Communication had to avoid acknowledgement of the family history of 'pain'. In one sense, this 'lack of practice' on *how* ordinary communication works in families meant that the survivor's 'extreme experiences', their unspeakable, became for their children, the second generation, the unaskable. 'Silence' around the past meant that the best that children could do was to imagine.

But at another level, such silence also unintentionally censored many 'ordinary' talks that usually take place between parents and children; experiences that most of us take for granted as part of 'growing up' became 'taboo'. This sometimes resulted in a sad situation where 'ordinary' events of joy, sadness or surprises, became problematic. Eventually such patterns lead to 'emotional' silences even when the dinner table may have been a noisy feast of practical 'talk'.

The central struggle to speak about emotional issues is deeply personal and often a mysterious process to understand. Some people in Holocaust families pass through life never even aware that they avoided issues that were possible to speak about. They have so expertly avoided speaking about the ordinary that later in life they are surprised when by chance they discover such 'secrets' can be revealed: a moment of revelation may arise while watching a movie, reading a book, talking with family or friend, or that profound 'aha' moment in therapy. Or in a Workshop!

Natalie Krasnostein, with whom I have the privilege to work as a co-facilitator, describes how she engages a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation participants invited to explore what it means to be '3<sup>rd</sup> generation'. As co-facilitators, we try to offer moments of clarification when issues seem to get stuck; occasionally provide a brief commentary on possible reasons for struggles or difficulty trying to 'unstick' these moments; offer space to further explore meanings of the struggles when trying to make sense of feelings and thought; and finally, as psychotherapist Tania Nahum recommends, to ask the unasked questions and speak the unthought thoughts.

These are some of my reflections, as a privileged second generation facilitator-participant, in a series of third generation 'workshops'. Natalie's insightful article which follows describes in detail her innovative approach to nothing less than changing the third generational consciousness in Melbourne, through her vision to realize a cherished dream.

## **3.2 Third Generation Holocaust Workshops and Theatrical Play (3GH)**

### **A work in progress...**

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Pain, existential angst, struggling with sense of purpose and meaning, 'righting' injustices, pondering Jewish/cultural/human/personal identity, marrying in, marrying out, God, lack of God and anti-Semitism - are topics that regularly enter the realms of social discourse in my world. The topic of the Holocaust to a Jew and especially a Jewish descendant of survivors can easily move into many or all of those areas. With this in mind, it isn't surprising to me that while some members of the 'third' generation are drawn towards exploring the topic of their connection to their family's (and tribe's) Holocaust survivor 'past', others are equally determined to distance themselves from acknowledging any such links.

### **The Workshop**

On Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2006, ten grandchildren of Holocaust survivors gathered at the Melbourne Jewish Holocaust Museum to explore the personal meaning of being a descendant of Holocaust survivors. Six three-hour workshops are designed to facilitate exploration for third generation descendants through discussion, creative arts techniques such as psychodrama, art, video journal entries, writing and self reflection. This opportunity is for the participants to engage in their own personal line of inquiry into their Holocaust survivor lineage using creative and innovative techniques, a unique rite of passage to weave the Holocaust into identity in ways that are authentic and relevant.

This project is an extension of my psychology honors thesis entitled "A Study of Third Generation Holocaust Descendants". Support in the form of a grant from the Meyer Burston Foundation (Friends of the Jewish Holocaust Museum) enabled me to conduct these workshops to develop a script that will culminate in a theatrical play.

### **Why do it?**

Throughout the five years that I spent completing my thesis the controversial question – have grandchildren of survivors been affected? - has struck a familiar nerve with many people who bring many different responses and ideas to this conversation, for example: *Enough with the Holocaust; We must not let it happen again; 'Marry in' so Hitler doesn't win; How can I heal when the Holocaust is still happening?*

These and other responses I hear regularly from Jews and non-Jews indicated to me that exploring the impact of the Holocaust on my generation, 3GH, was an essential line of inquiry into gaining a deeper understanding of both myself and my generation.

### **The Third generation and The Truth Nerve**

In my view we are the pivotal generation, willing to look at the effects of the Holocaust with a different and perhaps more distant view than our parents, the second generation, and our survivor grandparents are able. One level of tension exists

because even though there is more distance, we are still so close because it happened to our family.

The third generation has received all of the fruits of our grandparents' labor. We have enjoyed opportunities they didn't have - personal, cultural and religious freedom - an affluent way of life, abundance of food, education, travel, so many opportunities. In contrast, our parents and grandparents were refugees and most were denied freedom on all levels. A second level of tension exists because although we have amazing opportunities to flourish and be free compared to our grandparents, we struggle with an 'internal' war – we seek happiness, a sense of purpose, belonging and meaning.

My grandmother, my mother and myself - the maternal line - regularly gather for cappuccinos and lattes (already an intergenerational difference just in our coffee consumption). My mother and my grandmother have such different views and ideas compared to my own, and in that I feel simultaneously blessed and tormented. I am struck by the closeness and the conflicts, – the differences, the love, the laughter and tears, the messiness and the imperfection. Something is always in the air that is powerful and palpable and I can't put my finger on it, but I know I feel like crying at that moment and I just wish I could capture it and hold onto it forever. Maybe the fear that it *won't* be forever provides the energy behind this project. Tears and laughter in the same breath. That and the fact that the three generations of women are all from entirely different "planets" often provides rich and fertile soil for us to sit drinking coffee together.

The "Truth Nerve" is my term that I often use to describe the feeling which says *this is wrong, this is right, this is not fair and I want it to be right*. The truth nerve enables me to articulate and develop means to turn around what is dysfunctional. We have opportunities to do this politically and personally - in our families, in our intimate relationships, in the therapy rooms, at work, in court. We may be traumatized but we are not paralyzed. So we gather our belongings and backpacks and travel to those places intellectually, emotionally and geographically where we can get more juice and more permission to live closer to our truth nerves.

Some third gens. are grappling with the Holocaust in terms of where and how it fits into their Jewish identity. Some are deeply committed to social justice, some ponder existential concepts such as *If it weren't for Hitler I wouldn't be me as Hitler was my grandparent's matchmaker*. The need for inner healing and family healing, dealing with anger, wanting to right the wrongs, denying effects, dealing with Holocaust denial, feeling burdened with the responsibility of carrying on the legacy, pondering notions of control, guilt, pressure to achieve and of course dealing with the good old persecution complex are some of the issues being illuminated within the realms of this project.

### **Why does a group called '3GH exists' when others doubt it?**

3GH exists because we live in Melbourne, one of the largest Jewish Holocaust survivor communities in the world. People may doubt that the 'third' generation exists because not all people see the world within the same frame of reference. The descriptions, stories and 'filters' in which we choose to describe our world-view are

personal, sacred territory that can only be named and claimed by the owner. If individuals of the third generation are identifying, then it's probably real.

Another question/criticism that arises is what issues belong to the Holocaust and what doesn't? There are so many factors and characteristics to untangle which determine who and how a person is in the world. It is the *questioning* that leads to insights.

Plus, the Holocaust, as a line of inquiry, is a valid point of entry into reconciling a Jewish identity for some. I know people who have more of a Holocaust identity than they do a Jewish identity. They will claim that they need to marry "in" because their grandparent survived the worst Jewish persecution. Clearly if someone is subscribing to a Jewish identity which is based on the Holocaust, in comparison to an affirmative Jewish identity based on its values and lifestyle orientation, then it's worth an investigation.

### **The Aim of the Workshop**

The aim of the workshop is to provide an opportunity for people to voice whatever is going on for them in relation to the Holocaust. By doing so, by hearing one another, by being present to our feelings - there is the chance to become more whole, more integrated and more empowered. There is a bigger picture too. Being Jewish brings with it by birthright a plethora of intensities – persecution (real or imagined?) and political, religious and cultural tensions. On so many levels just by being born a Jew, a great big journey and responsibility awaits, whether one embraces a Jewish identity or rejects one. So maybe many people in my generation could benefit from this type of workshop, as the Holocaust relates to the wider persecution paradigm in our history's DNA – slavery, destruction of temples, the Spanish Inquisition, pogroms and the currently fraught situation in Israel. I feel that it is important to talk about what that 'cycle of trauma' means in our 3GH experience and how we feel about it.

### **The Play**

After the workshop, I am planning a six-month theatre-creating phase. The actors will be third generation descendants - both professional and non-professional actors. The aim of the play is to reflect these issues to the wider community. While I have a vision, as yet I have to decide on the focus of the play, characters, themes and the form of presentation. As the director of this piece I see ahead an exciting organic, evolving process as the details emerge, like the processes involved in all mysteries, as they are revealed we enter a new phase of becoming...a work in real progress.

***The outcome of the six-week workshop including a video documentary will be presented at Limmud Oz in Melbourne and Oranim and Yad Vashem's 'Teaching the Holocaust to Future Generations' Seminar in Jerusalem in June 2006.***

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