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Ageless Voices: Survivor Testimonies in the Digital Era

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the late-life testimonies and public work of Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Teréz Virág, two Hungarian-born child survivors of the Holocaust whose engagement with Holocaust memory intensified in old age. Drawing on the life-history interviews they recorded for the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive in the late 1990s, the study explores how trauma, ageing, gender, and testimony intersect, and how their stories unsettle dominant narratives of both Holocaust survival and later life. Challenging cultural scripts of decline and stereotypes of older women, the article argues that Klein Kassenoff and Virág show how later life can be marked by renewed agency, ethical responsibility, and social contribution. Both women faced professional crises after midlife: Klein Kassenoff experienced antisemitic harassment, and Virág was forced into early retirement. Each turned this rupture into a new vocation. Klein Kassenoff became a pioneering Holocaust educator in the United States, and Virág founded the KÚT Foundation (KÚT Alapítvány) in Hungary to provide free psychological support to Holocaust survivors. The article also considers how digital archives and related initiatives, including the Visual History Archive, IWitness, and Dimensions in Testimony, are reshaping contemporary Holocaust memory. It concludes that ageing is integral to the ethical force of survivor testimony. This point grows more urgent as the world enters a post-witness era, in which remembrance increasingly depends on mediated, institutional, and intergenerational forms of memory.

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So in life, you don't have to try to change the world. You're not gonna be able to. But you can always throw in a pebble. No matter how small, if you can touch one person, even in a small way, you can be sure the ripples will go very far.

Annette Baslaw-Finger, Holocaust survivor

INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust has been one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. It is very important to emphasise, though, that it was not only a world-historical catastrophe but also a deeply personal trauma—a life-defining condition that Holocaust survivors carry well into old age. Survivors and witnesses continue to bear the burden of their memories, holding both the weight of their suffering and the ethical responsibility to transmit their stories to future generations.

This responsibility, however, seldom begins immediately after the traumatic event. Testimonial speech frequently occurs only after a long period of silence, which may result from psychological overwhelm, the delayed nature of trauma (Caruth 17), or the lack of a receptive audience ready and capable of listening. Dori Laub explains this delay: because the mind cannot register massive trauma as it happens, a survivor's testimony begins as "a record that has yet to be made" (Felman and Laub 57). The event becomes known only when the survivor shares it with an attentive listener, who accompanies them on a journey they cannot make alone (*id*. 57–59). It may also depend on the specific social and institutional conditions that make testimonial witnessing legitimate and publicly meaningful.[1]

The present article examines the late-life testimonies and public work of Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Teréz Virág, two women who survived the Holocaust as children and gave their testimonies to the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation in the late 1990s, decades after their initial trauma. Most importantly, both made important career shifts at a later stage in their lives, dedicating themselves to Holocaust-related work: Klein Kassenoff as a Holocaust educator in the United States of America and Virág as a clinical psychologist working with Holocaust survivors and their descendants in Hungary. For both women, professional engagement with Holocaust memory became the means by which they confronted their own childhood trauma.

Their later-life choices challenge the pervasive cultural belief that ageing is a period of withdrawal or decline—what Margaret Morganroth Gullette terms the "decline narrative" of ageing (*Aged by Culture* 13). Gullette contends that "*decline* is the narrative about ageing-past-youth systematically taught to us from on high". In other words, society forms our perception of ageing as a process of losing power, purpose, and relevance (*Ending Ageism* xiii). This view is also sustained by social, medical, and cultural discourses that portray ageing as a decline in ability, agency, and significance (*Declining to Decline*; *Aged by Culture*).

Kathleen Woodward similarly notes that Western narratives about ageing often foreground deterioration and decline, thus reproducing the social marginalisation of older people. She maintains that these narratives are not inherent reflections of biological change but culturally constructed stories that influence how people envisage their future. Such decline narratives generate fear, anxiety, and denial and also exclude alternative visions of later life that might instead embrace desire, agency, or ethical responsibility ("Introduction" x–xiii, xv–xvi).

Youth-obsessed Western cultures also propagate stereotypes that make older adults seem like outsiders or inherently inferior members of society. Simone de Beauvoir remarks that "Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species" (283–84). Woodward calls this the cultural invisibility of old age, especially when it comes to its lived, embodied complexity. Instead of seeing old age as a natural part of life, it is often shown as a sudden break, making older people appear different or separate. Woodward also points out that these views are particularly harsh on older women, whose ageing bodies are judged more negatively in a culture that links femininity to youth. Consequently, ageing individuals are forced outside mainstream narratives of productivity, desirability, and

future potential, thereby normalising ageism as an unjust and deeply embedded social attitude (*Aging* 67; "Performing Age" 162–64).

When Klein Kassenoff and Virág shared their testimonies with the USC Shoah Foundation, they faced double marginality: they were Jewish Holocaust survivors whose voices had historically been silenced, and they were also ageing women, who are, as a rule, overlooked and sidelined by contemporary society. Neither of them accepted this erasure. Beyond telling their stories, they founded institutions, mentored younger generations, and engaged with digitally mediated remembrance practices to ensure their testimonies would outlive them. Their work exemplifies what the USC Shoah Foundation's initiatives demonstrate more broadly: that elderly survivors function as indispensable moral and pedagogical authorities, not despite their age but because of it.

This article argues that age is not a peripheral feature of their testimony but central to understanding its form, meaning, and impact. The temporal distance, hard-won wisdom, and moral authority that come with late life convert these testimonies into a compelling form of ethical and cultural intervention.

WHAT WAS THE HOLOCAUST, AND WHO IS A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR?

The Holocaust was neither the first nor the last genocide in history, but it is regarded as one of the most extreme in both scale and the ideological fanaticism that fuelled it. This study adopts the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) definition: "The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators" (USHMM).

The term "holocaust" is derived from ancient Greek and means "burnt offering," and was originally used to refer to destruction or sacrifice by fire. Since 1945, however, it has become indelibly linked to the Nazi plan to exterminate European Jews during the Second World War. Jewish communities mostly prefer to use the Hebrew word "Shoah," meaning "catastrophe," rather than "Holocaust." It is noteworthy that although the Holocaust primarily targeted Jewish populations, the Nazi regime also committed genocide against the Roma and Sinti peoples and persecuted and murdered various other groups, including homosexuals, Slavs (millions of Soviet prisoners of war, civilians, and ethnic Poles), political dissidents, Jehovah's Witnesses, people with disabilities, and others (Altman; USHMM).

Given Nazi ideology's cruel view of human "worth" based on productivity, the elderly were in a particularly vulnerable position during the Holocaust and the Second World War. Elderly Jews, along with the very young, pregnant women, the infirm, and disabled individuals, were among the first victims selected to be killed in gas chambers upon arrival at death camps, deemed unfit for forced labour.

Yet beyond the confines of concentration camps, elderly individuals faced extreme vulnerability in ghettos, in hiding, or while fleeing, succumbing more easily to starvation, disease, and violence. The Nazis regarded elderly Jewish people as the lowest social group, exemplifying that the Holocaust was motivated not only by antisemitism but also by profound disrespect for old age (cf. Stone 385, 397–98; Strauss 424–44).

Recognising this historical devaluation of old age is essential for understanding why the voices of elderly Holocaust survivors today carry such a distinctive ethical weight. Those who reached advanced age did so in the face of a system that was explicitly designed to eliminate them: first as Jews, then doubly as elderly individuals deemed "unproductive" and "worthless." In this context, their very survival into later life constitutes a form of historical defiance, and their testimonies serve not merely as documentation of past events but as embodied proofs that the Nazi logic of disposability ultimately failed.

The USHMM has defined a survivor as 'any persons, Jewish or non-Jewish, who were displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social, and political policies of the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945' (qtd. in Clifford 2). This includes those who lived through the horrors of the concentration camps, as well as those who survived in ghettos, in hiding, or by fleeing the country. Today, our concept of a "survivor" is

justifiably broad, covering anyone who avoided death by any means necessary. Noteworthily, before the 1980s, the term "child survivor" would not have been used to describe children who survived the Holocaust (Clifford 3).

Special attention should be given to the term "child survivor" here. This is because even the youngest survivors, born in the final year of the Second World War, are now at least eighty years old. As time goes on, the number of living Holocaust survivors, including these child survivors, is rapidly diminishing. The majority of those who lived through the Holocaust and witnessed its atrocities first-hand have already died. According to the Claims Conference report (data as of January 2026), the number of Holocaust survivors has fallen to approximately 196,600. The median age of survivors is now eighty-seven, with many in their nineties or older. Almost all Jewish Holocaust survivors (97%) are classified as child survivors, who were born in 1928 or later. Women constitute the majority of this population (62%), while men account for only 38%. It is estimated that almost 90% of the world's Holocaust survivors may be lost within fifteen years ("Vanishing Witnesses"; "2026 Survivor Data Info Sheet").

This demographic ageing and the loss of survivors have far-reaching consequences: they mark the transition of the Holocaust from a living memory to a historical record. As first-hand witnesses grow fewer, the preservation of survivor testimony is becoming more urgent. Philosopher Avishai Margalit argues that when direct memory fades, the ethical responsibility to remember must be taken up by the wider community and its institutions (74–83). For many survivors, particularly in advanced age, this sense of responsibility intensifies. They often feel a deep moral obligation to speak out before it is "too late," making sure that their experiences are not lost to time.

THE ERA OF THE WITNESS: USC SHOAH FOUNDATION

The reasons Klein Kassenoff and Virág gave their testimonies later in life—at ages sixty-one and sixty-eight, in interviews in 1998 and 1999, respectively—are intricate, multifaceted, and also influenced by the national context. Nonetheless, both cases correspond with the analysis of the French historian Annette Wieviorka, who contends that Holocaust memory and survivors' testimonies in particular only entered public consciousness decades after the war ended. She characterises the period from 1945 to the 1950s as one in which the memory of the genocide remained almost entirely private. During this time, the wider world was largely unwilling to confront the atrocities and suffering endured by Holocaust victims. Initial forms of testimony, such as memorial books, did exist but received minimal public attention, which Wieviorka compares to "cemeteries that no one ever visited" (28).

The 1961 Eichmann trial undoubtedly brought about significant changes to the collective memory of the Holocaust, inaugurating what Wieviorka describes as 'the advent of the witness' (*id*. 56). Victims' testimony became a vital part of the court process, which "lent it the weight of the state's legitimacy, institutions, and symbolic power" (*id.* 84). Moreover, the witness gained a socially recognised identity as a "survivor," which also created a new social function: to testify to history for future generations (*id.* 88). This transformation also corresponds to Margalit's notion of the "moral witness" (147–82), a person who not only reports facts but also fulfils a deeper ethical duty by sharing their personal suffering to prompt society to reflect and remember.

Wieviorka situates the full emergence of the "era of the witness" in the 1970s (96), when expanding mass media, new audiovisual technologies, and a growing therapeutic and human-rights culture placed individual experience at the core of political and moral concern. From this point onward, first-person accounts became a permanent and expected component of televised documentaries and curated exhibitions on the Holocaust. In this context, the witness gained a recognised social and pedagogical function, speaking not only to courts and specialist historians but also to students, visitors, and the general public. Testimony thus became a primary medium through which Holocaust history was communicated, playing an important role in shaping both collective memory and educational practices up to the present day.

Since awareness of the importance of survivor testimonies continues to grow and the urgency to preserve these living witnesses intensifies with time, a great number of initiatives have been launched to document their stories for future generations. One of the largest and most

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comprehensive of these efforts is the Visual History Archive (VHA) of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation. The Shoah Foundation was created by Steven Spielberg in 1994, a year after his Oscar-winning film *Schindler's List*. While working on his film, Spielberg interviewed many Holocaust survivors and realised that these stories had not been formally recorded. Between 1994 and 1999, the Foundation recorded nearly 52,000 video testimonies, which were later digitalised and stored in the archive. Since 2013, the archive has expanded to include testimonies from survivors of events such as the Rwandan genocide, the Nanjing massacre, the Guatemalan genocide, the Armenian genocide, the Cambodian genocide, the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflict in the Central African Republic, the Rohingya mass violence, and the South Sudan Civil War.

The Holocaust testimonies consist of life interviews that cover the interviewees' lives before, during, and after their first-hand experience with the genocide. The archive is fully searchable through indexed keywords and timestamps, enabling users to navigate across themes, places, and periods. The majority of the videos are approximately two hours long and were recorded across 70 countries in 44 languages. Most interviews were conducted in the interviewee's language of choice. For many survivors who immigrated to other countries after the war, this was a language other than their native tongue. The USC Shoah Foundation therefore warns that the language used may affect the content of the testimony, the level of detail provided, and the word choices (cf. "Considerations and Guidelines" 5–6).[2] As of now, the archive contains 60,394 video testimonies, with some accessible online and others available at 204 designated access sites worldwide.[3]

Remarkably, the majority of testimonies came from elderly Holocaust survivors, most of whom were in their early seventies at the time of recording. The oldest documented individual was Robert Haas, born in 1898, who was ninety-seven when interviewed in 1995, while the youngest, Zsuzsa Jávor, born in 1944, was interviewed in 1999 at age fifty-four (cf. Tóth; "USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive"). This predominance of elderly survivors is not simply demographic happenstance but a culturally and ethically significant dimension of the archive itself. As Woodward and Gullette have also observed, Western cultures frequently associate old age with diminished agency and social redundancy. In this light, the USC Shoah Foundation—by overrepresenting elderly individuals—plays a crucial role in reassigning epistemic, moral, and pedagogical authority to ageing adults whose voices are otherwise so often marginalised.

Precisely because these testimonies carry such ethical and historical weight, the Visual History Archive has come to serve not only as an academic repository but also as a platform for new forms of public and educational engagement. The USC Shoah Foundation has also launched new initiatives that use these late-life testimonies for interactive pedagogical and commemorative practices. Notable examples include *IWitness*, an educational platform that integrates survivor testimonies into classrooms worldwide, and *Dimensions in Testimony*, an innovative project that transforms recorded testimony into a conversation-like encounter between future generations and Holocaust survivors.

IWitness is a free educational platform designed for middle and high school students that integrates survivor testimonies into classroom learning. Through interactive activities, such as writing essays and multimedia projects, students engage critically with historical sources while developing empathy and ethical thinking. Importantly, the platform also mediates intergenerational encounters: students interact not with abstract history, but with the voices and presence of ageing witnesses (cf. *IWitness*).

Dimensions in Testimony uses interactive technology to create conversational encounters with pre-recorded witnesses. The project currently includes 71 three-dimensional testimonies, each constructed from approximately 1,000 sets of questions and responses recorded over multiple days. Interviewees wore identical clothing during filming to ensure visual continuity. Although originally designed for museums and memorial sites, selected testimonies are publicly accessible online. At the time of recording, most witnesses were in their late eighties or nineties, with Ben Ferencz filmed at age one hundred (USC Shoah Foundation, Dimensions in Testimony).

Most significantly, the witnesses' advanced age strengthens, rather than diminishes, the historical importance and immediacy of their testimonies. The audible and visible markers of

ageing—trembling voices, frail bodies, palpable mortality—serve a paradoxical testimonial function. On one hand, these signs of physical vulnerability mark temporal distance, revealing how many decades have passed since the atrocities occurred. On the other hand, they create a sense of urgent proximity by making the witnesses' irreplaceable embodied knowledge acutely present. The project harnesses old age as a testimonial resource, producing even more compelling digital testimonies precisely because these survivors represent the last living link to the twentieth century's worst mass atrocities.

Many Holocaust survivors fear that when they are gone, their stories will disappear as well. These people were meant to be annihilated and murdered. They were stripped of their identities and reduced to mere numbers. The program guarantees that their stories will continue to be told and their legacy will live on. It offers a form of symbolic immortality to Holocaust survivors, allowing their voices to resonate and answer questions long after the era of the Nazis has ended ("Dimensions in Testimony Interviewees"; "Dimensions in Testimony").

TWO TESTIMONIES FROM THE VISUAL HISTORY ARCHIVE OF THE USC SHOAH FOUNDATION

This section discusses the late-adult testimonies of two female child Holocaust survivors: Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Teréz Virág, both of whom recorded life-history interviews for the USC Shoah Foundation. Both women are of Hungarian origin. Klein Kassenoff gave her testimony in English, the language of her adopted country, while Virág testified in Hungarian, the native language of both women. Neither woman was a prisoner of a concentration camp. Nevertheless, both of them were deeply traumatised by the Holocaust, albeit to differing degrees and with varying levels of awareness at the time. For decades, neither could speak publicly about her childhood trauma. Later in life, however, each experienced a professional crisis that catalysed a new engagement with Holocaust memory: antisemitic harassment pushed Klein Kassenoff toward formal Holocaust education, while Virág's forced early retirement redirected her towards clinical work with survivors and their descendants.

Klein Kassenoff and Virág's testimonies were selected as case studies because their experiences illuminate the intricate connections between ageing, gender, trauma, and testimony that usually remain underexplored in Holocaust studies. Both women show how Holocaust-related trauma can lie dormant for decades and later resurface, particularly during personal or institutional crises that threaten established identities. Their trajectories support Woodward's idea that old age can reopen unresolved wounds for child survivors, while also presenting new opportunities for moral reflection and understanding ("Introduction").

At the same time, their stories challenge prevalent ageist assumptions that older women would be socially marginalised or passive. Instead of withdrawing from public life, both women turned their experiences of discrimination and displacement into active roles in Holocaust remembrance and care. Their late-life transformations show that ageing can indeed be a productive period for ethical action, professional growth, and historical testimony (Declining to Decline; Aged by Culture; Ending Ageism).

MIRIAM KLEIN KASSENOFF: FROM JEWISH REFUGEE TO HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR

Klein Kassenoff's testimony, recorded in 1998 in Miami Beach, Florida, provides a detailed account of her family's flight from Košice (Kassa), today Slovakia but then part of Hungary, in 1940. At the age of four, she, together with her parents and infant brother, embarked on a seven-month journey across seven countries before they finally reached Lisbon, one of the last safe havens for Jews in Europe at the time. There, the family joined thousands of Jewish refugees waiting for passage to the United States. In 1941, with the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the family left Portugal for the United States of America.

After moving to Nashville, Tennessee, the family encountered institutionalised segregation in the United States for the first time. As Jewish refugees, they were all deeply shocked by this system. Klein Kassenoff's first friend in the United States was a Black girl, but the police soon

visited their home to inform her parents that such an association was not permitted. Despite this, Klein Kassenoff maintained the friendship. Her mother was equally disturbed upon discovering that the rear seats of public buses were reserved for Black passengers. In her interview, Klein Kassenoff reflected on how these early experiences in the United States influenced her decision to become a teacher dedicated to fighting racism and prejudice.

Klein Kassenoff's journey as a Holocaust educator began at age forty, after an antisemitic incident at a military base high school in Miami, where she taught. She recalled that after introducing Elie Wiesel's *Night* to her tenth-grade literature class, she had faced antisemitic harassment from her students, including swastikas carved into her desk. Neither the school administration nor the teachers' union intervened. This incident later led her to enrol in Yad Vashem's teacher-training programme at the International Centre for Holocaust Studies, making her one of the first American teachers to receive formal Holocaust educational training.

This professional turn was also closely tied to the long-standing silences in her family. Like many child survivors, Klein Kassenoff grew up in a household where the Holocaust was omnipresent but rarely talked about. Although she was aware of past suffering, her parents were either unable or unwilling to answer her many questions about their experiences. For a period earlier in her life, especially when she began her graduate studies at Indiana University, she found relief in distancing herself from her Jewish identity and from being publicly known as a Holocaust survivor. This desire for normality, in fact, reflects a common strategy among survivors. However, the unanswered questions persisted, reemerging later in life and pushing her to confront the history that shaped both her family and her identity.

Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff earned her PhD in education in 1997, writing her dissertation on Holocaust education ("Interview 42455"). She currently serves as the founding director of the Teacher Institute on Holocaust Studies at the University of Miami. At the age of ninety, she remains professionally active, participating in teaching and educator-training programmes. Her online seminars continue to attract a large number of participants, demonstrating her ongoing influence and relevance in the field. She consistently maintains that her career should serve as an encouraging example for women, demonstrating how age can be a source of credibility rather than a barrier to professional contribution (Klein, "Interview 42455").

TERÉZ VIRÁG: FROM CHILDHOOD TRAUMA TO SOCIAL HEALING

Dr. Teréz Virág's witness account of the Holocaust is also available in the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive and was recorded in Budapest in 1999, one year before her sudden death in 2000. Similar to Klein Kassenoff, Virág was around forty years old when she decided to return to university to pursue a career in psychology, having previously been a teacher of economics. She went on to become a leading child psychotherapist in Hungary, specialising in severe clinical cases. Virág developed a unique methodology centred on compassion and understanding to rehabilitate deeply traumatised children.

Virág discovered that children with neurotic and psychosomatic symptoms, who come from families with a history of trauma, often experience associations between everyday occurrences and their parents' suppressed traumatic memories. When parents or grandparents react with heightened anxiety to certain situations or stumble over words connected to past trauma, their visible tension can alert the child to the possibility of an unspoken and shameful secret behind these occurrences, creating an uncanny sense of *déjà vu* in the child for experiences they never directly lived. Virág also realised that understanding a child's issues cannot be divorced from the context of their family dynamics and social environment. She strongly emphasised the importance of exploring the social influences that lie behind neurotic symptoms (*Örökbe fogadott* 5–8).

In 1944, Virág's mother was deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp, leaving Virág, then only fourteen, to look after her younger sister by herself in the Budapest ghetto. In the USC Shoah Foundation interview, Virág often reflected on how her childhood was stripped from her on the day she was separated from her mother. Fortunately, her mother survived and was able to reunite with her daughters after the war. Nonetheless, it was not until 1981, when Virág was fifty years old and mourning her mother's death, that she realised how little she knew about her mother's suffering in the concentration camp ("Interview 50375").

Like Klein Kassenoff, Virág was unable to communicate with her closest family members about their traumas. It was only after her mother's death that Virág could open her heart to the sufferings of the other Holocaust survivors. In Hungary, she was the first to identify 'Holocaust syndrome' in survivors' grandchildren, and her writings trace how the psychological damage caused by social trauma is passed down through the generations (cf. Virág, Children of Social Trauma; Virág, Mély kútba tekinték).

In her interview, Virág recounted how institutional marginalisation catalysed her career's most significant professional reinvention. In 1987, at just fifty-six, she was abruptly forced into early retirement by a much younger male director at Hungary's leading children's clinic. She described this as a shattering moment, yet one that ultimately set her on a new path.

She said that without this forced departure, she would never have founded the *KÚT Alapítvány* (*Well Foundation*), a trauma-support organisation for Holocaust victims, which she led until her death in 2000 ("Interview 50375"). The *Well Foundation* continues—to this day—to provide specialised psychological support to Holocaust survivors and their family members. Uniquely, the *Well Foundation* remains accessible to all victims of social persecution, including even the descendants of perpetrators. Another founding principle of the organisation is that, since society made its patients ill, psychologists working there cannot accept payment for their therapeutic work.[4]

Klein Kassenoff's and Virág's experiences illustrate the ways in which Holocaust survivors contest Gullette's decline narrative. Far from retreating into private lives, as cultural scripts would predict for ageing women, they took on pioneering roles in Holocaust memory. Both were ageing women in a male-dominated world, which positioned them as vulnerable and expendable. Nevertheless, they resisted this diminishment by reinventing themselves through new professional paths. Their continued agency in later life challenges not only ageist stereotypes of declining capacity but also patriarchal structures that systematically sideline ageing women and historical narratives that would render Holocaust survivors passive victims rather than active agents of memory.

Ironically, both women recognised a painful paradox in their interviews: the very injustices that threatened to erase them in later life, such as antisemitic harassment for Klein Kassenoff and the forced early retirement for Virág, ultimately motivated them to engage more actively with Holocaust memory. These shattering experiences in later life allowed them to reconnect with their childhood trauma, when they had historically been powerless to challenge such injustices. They now possessed what their younger selves had lacked: the accumulated wisdom, psychological resources, and historical conditions necessary to transform vulnerability into action. Instead of accepting renewed silencing and marginalisation, they claimed their voices precisely at the life stage when dominant narratives would predict passivity and withdrawal.

Their full-life testimonies given to the USC Shoah Foundation, which are publicly accessible and incorporated into various *IWitness* educational initiatives, are of particular significance. These accounts transmit to the world how ageing Holocaust survivors can resist both ageist perceptions and the risk of historical erasure, how they can understand and reinterpret the enduring effects of trauma through the lens of lived experience, and contribute to education and social healing. By documenting their life stories, after decades of silence, professional reinvention, and activism, Klein Kassenoff and Virág shared not only their childhood trauma but also the lifelong process of integrating those experiences into purposeful and meaningful lives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The testimonies of Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Teréz Virág demonstrate that Holocaust memory is not a static historical record of the past but a dynamic and evolving process that unfolds over the course of an individual's life. Their stories reveal how trauma, testimony, and ageing intersect in ways that question traditional narratives of Holocaust survival and prevailing cultural assumptions about old age.

This article has argued that age is not incidental to their testimony but constitutive of its ethical force. The temporal distance that comes with ageing gave both women the psychological space, reflective capacity, and moral authority necessary to transform personal trauma into public witness. Furthermore, their late-life career shifts occurred when they had gained the

maturity, institutional understanding, and lived experience essential to addressing injustice effectively.

Contrary to Gullette's decline narrative and Woodward's account of the cultural invisibility of old age, Klein Kassenoff and Virág exemplify how later life can become a period of renewed agency, purpose, and social engagement. Their professional reinventions in midlife and old age indeed challenged ageist and patriarchal assumptions that routinely marginalise older women as irrelevant or expendable. Both women transformed personal and institutional injustices into meaningful contributions to Holocaust education, psychological healing, and intergenerational dialogue.

The USC Shoah Foundation's initiatives further illustrate the centrality of ageing to contemporary Holocaust memory. These projects were developed in collaboration with elderly survivors, whose participation has profoundly influenced the methods by which testimony is preserved, curated, and taught. By integrating late-life testimonies into educational platforms such as *IWitness* and *Dimensions in Testimony*, the Shoah Foundation allows students to engage with history not as abstract data but as lived experience. This mediated intergenerational encounter diminishes the emotional distance between students and the past while promoting empathy and ethical reflection.

As the last generation of Holocaust survivors approaches its final years, the imperative to preserve their testimonies intensifies. In the emerging "post-witness era," the ethical responsibility for remembrance increasingly shifts from survivors to institutions, educators, and audiences. The testimonies of Klein Kassenoff and Virág show that remembering the Holocaust is not only about preserving facts but also about nurturing a moral community built on empathy, shared responsibility, and constant vigilance against the forces of dehumanisation. Their lives demonstrate that survival is not merely biological endurance but a lifelong process of meaning-making, testimony, and social engagement.

NOTES

1 For further information, see Wieviorka 96–144.

2 Additional information is available at the USC Shoah Foundation.

3 For further details, refer to the USC Shoah Foundation's *Visual Archive*.

4 For more information on the *Well Foundation*'s work, see KÚTblog.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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