

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

*"Everything suppressed in one generation will inevitably explode in the next."
Mary, H. Rothschild*

I will be referring to this dissertation as a discourse as it is about peoples' shared narratives, mine and others and because it is written in a discursive style so that the reader too, can be part of the conversation.

This discourse has provided me with the opportunity to explore the continued and necessary reckoning, six decades after the Holocaust, for my cohort generally called, 'Children of Holocaust Survivors'. The writing of this text became a way for me to come to terms with what is essentially an existential issue for me.

I began this journey when I found myself at a point in life where I felt compelled to discern what it has meant to have come into being in relation to the Holocaust, after a lifetime of 'knowing and not-knowing', a concept I will explore. The question, with which I began this exploration, was what I considered to be a new, constructive question, focused on the meaning of 'resilience' after trauma or tragedy:

How is it that the members of a generation that have been brought up under the shadow of the Holocaust and its losses, are able to not only to get on with their lives, but to be successful and helpful and compassionate with their fellow human beings?

The question came from what I observed growing up as a child. I saw the efforts of myself; my brother and the children of my parents' friends from 'the war' adjust to a new country, a new language, a new culture all the time also serving the needs of their parents who had gone through so much tragedy and loss. I watched them in their adolescence, silently unable to share their own real and imagined Holocaust. I watched them as they grew up, some highly successful and some barely managing. And I wondered. I wondered -- where did some people, both survivor parents and their children -- get the resilience to get on with their lives after the horror of the Holocaust, while others had difficulty adapting to life's challenges.

I thought I was going to explore the answer to this question but much sadness and emotion came quickly with this pursuit. I had long ago accepted and embraced the sadness, so when someone asked me if I was undertaking this research as a way of healing, I decided to reflect on my true motivations as I went through this journey. I have since come to call my journey a process of excavation, rather than a journey of healing. Because I believe in the *process* of a journey, the in-between of the journey,

the excavating and reconstructing, the curiosity and the consolidation, the folding in and folding out; healing does not capture all the magic that happens when we are in *process*. Moreover, I am not interested in formulaic, short-lived, black and white 'healing' answers so prevalent in to-day's sound-bite world. Healing also implies that there is something that is broken in me, something that needs to be fixed. This corrective process is founded in a pathological paradigm, making the person that needs to be fixed non-influential and ineffectual. Within the Social Constructionist paradigm, one that I ascribe to, this process is considered unproductive. And so, rather than make this journey about healing, I am making it about moving forward in a way that works for me.

I had begun thinking about this topic and my dissertation when I visited the Tate Gallery in London and came across a Paul Klee drawing, titled "*Burdened Children*". He created the drawing in 1930 after the First World War. I was dumbstruck at how perfectly this image captured what it is to be a child after a war, or perhaps a child of parents who had survived a war!



This drawing will accompany me and you, my welcome reader, as we move in the 'in-between' to excavate the experience of the 2nd Generation after the Holocaust and its universal relevance. The interplay of it's' lines and shapes within an undefined space is not to be grasped and therefore enables exploration of multiple meanings. The drawing will not only help me excavate the constructs, but it is fitting to the writing style and extensive use of visual and literary images and references that I use to help me mine the history, ethnography, emotions, ideas of the Generation after the Holocaust. I have a sense that Klee might have been a kindred spirit in a lateral way. He was a German, not a Jew, and left for Switzerland after being accused of being Jewish. He needed to separate from his parents who did not approve of his choice to be an artist. The need to flee, the need to separate from his parents, the sense of burden has resonance with the 2nd Generation Jewish experience as we shall see.

Klee's drawing, then will serve as a guide on my journey, its forward movement inspiring me to move forward through this difficult exploration with its' many paths, not unlike what Klee might have been feeling as he took his line for a walk.

The walk at times became rather compulsive, as I was creating and recreating the meanings that emerged. I started to see myself as the protagonist played by Richard Dreyfus in the film "*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*", who felt compelled to build a

form that looked much like a mountain but he had no idea what it meant, why he was building it, or where it would lead. He used mashed potatoes, shaving cream, garden dirt, whatever he could get his hands on to build this structure that was in the recesses of his mind.

Yet another purpose emerged with the writing of the dissertation. I found myself talking to 2nd Generation adult children of Europeans also affected by the Holocaust and I asked myself:

How can other 2nd Geners affected by the all sides all of the Holocaust, the perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, neighbours give meaning to their legacy for the sake of their inheritors?

With this question, we have the possibility to universalize this discussion and give meaning to those generations who have inherited the guilt and sorrow from all sides of the Holocaust: the perpetrators; the bystanders; the collaborators; the resisters, the rescuers, or the partisans.

As often happens when one begins a journey, I also found myself meeting kindred spirits, 2nd Generation adult children affected by the impact of trauma, displacement and other devastations: Native Americans; Korean, Dutch, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Palestinian, Iraqi, Egyptian, Sephardic Jewish people (displaced from Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, Iran, Africa, Yemen) and I posed a further question, indeed a global question:

Globally, how can successive generations affected by trauma, displacement and devastation get on with their lives and be successful, helpful and compassionate?

At the same time as I was researching the topic of resilience, I also felt it was time to carry out the painstaking task of finding out whatever I could about the death of my siblings and grandparents and my parents' story. It is generally not known what an onerous task this is. The double tragedy of losing so much and then coming up against legal, bureaucratic and technical obstacles of finding information added to the pain. I discovered I am not alone. There are many of us 2nd Geners who, like me, are diligently recreating their past.

Along with gathering family data, I had a deep need to find out about a felt memory I carried in my back since I was a child, regarding the murder of my siblings under the Nazi régime. This led me to pose the question:

Do we carry memories from one generation to another?

This question led me to concepts of phantom memory, post-memory and aberrated mourning.

In recognition that inheritors of tragedy in many forms exist today around the globe, I hope that this discourse finds relevance to anyone who has witnessed, directly or has inherited, the experience of war, displacement, social catastrophe, grief, devastating loss, or victimization.

I also recognize that the urgency I feel in undertaking this research originates from the counsel of Alice Miller (1997), Rothschild (2000) and First Nations oral wisdom, who warn us that we will perpetuate the burden to the next generation and the generation after that, if we do not find our individual processes for seeing beyond inherited losses and injustices.

To summarize, my purpose in this exploration is multi-faceted:

1. To create a provocative image and provocative language that engages the heart and brain at the rational, conscious and metaphorical, unconscious levels;
2. To help second generation children of traumatic events to understand themselves and their inherited context by exploring two questions. The first question is the one I began with; the second emerged during the course of the research:
 - i. *How is it that the members of a generation which has been brought up under the shadow of the Holocaust, are able not only to get on with their lives, but to be successful and helpful and compassionate with their fellow human beings?*
 - ii. *How can successive generations affected by trauma, displacement and devastation get on with their lives and be successful, helpful and compassionate and not perpetuate the guilt and sorrow?*

By exploring these questions, I hope to:

1. Create a new meaning of resilience;
2. Develop a greater understanding of the ethnography of the 2nd Generation children of Holocaust survivors;

3. Explore a new construct of memory and trans-generational memory;
4. Create new theoretical and dialogical constructs on secondary inheritors of trauma, displacement and devastation -- including the generations who have inherited the guilt and sorrow from all sides of the Holocaust: the perpetrators; the bystanders; the collaborators; or the resistance fighters;
5. Plant the seeds for new theoretical and dialogical constructs on secondary inheritors of a number of other kinds of trauma, including: national, ecological, technological trauma, displacement, victimization and loss that can occur in all parts of the world; and
6. Posit some methodological considerations for holding group dialogues with secondary inheritors of trauma, displacement and disastrous events.

It is in the spirit of Social Construction, a spirit of curiosity, an attitude of abundance and making meaning through and with others, that I invite you, the reader, to use this discourse to edify your own pursuit towards resilience, the impact of your past on your life and potentially on your descendants or to help you look at the difficult events that have impacted you directly or indirectly. As you read this discourse, perhaps you can begin your own discourse on what are the unspoken topics in your family? How can you begin discussing the un-discussable?

*Beyond our ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make sense any more.*

~ Rumi

And so, let us begin the journey, inspired by the forward movement depicted by the children in Klee's drawing, prepared for the many lines of inquiry that we will encounter.

