

Documenting Genocide Survivors' Experiences: An Interview with Karen Jungblut

Alexander Freund, University of Winnipeg

“When you talk to survivors from the different [genocides], having talked to Holocaust survivors, Rwandan genocide survivors, and Cambodian genocide survivors, they all appreciate the effort of people documenting and hearing from *them*, who went through it, to hear what it was like. You see a commonality [in] how they think about this now and you see the importance [...] of documenting each one and of people to have the opportunity to hear from them,” Karen Jungblut recently summed up her thirteen years of working for the Shoah Foundation. I interviewed her in Berlin in May 2009 to learn about the work of the foundation that Steven Spielberg had established in 1994, after filming “Schindler’s List” (the movie won seven Oscars).



Karen Jungblut (photo: A. Freund)

Karen Jungblut is the Director of Research and Documentation of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, CA. Almost from the beginning – joining the organization in 1996 - she was involved in the Foundation's project of interviewing and indexing some 52,000 witnesses to the Holocaust, most of them survivors. This was a global project; hence, the interviewees came from 56 countries and spoke 32 languages. The Foundation's archive is now housed at USC and accessible at several research institutions in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

In this interview, Karen Jungblut talks about her life and education in Germany as well as life, study, and work in the United States. She recounts learning about the Holocaust in school and visiting Dachau concentration camp with a group of students from Israel. After studying in New York, she worked at the United Nations. She then studied at the Free University Berlin. She recounts the problems she encountered when trying to research archival files about Nazi war crimes trials in Germany.

In the fall of 1995, she was trained as an interviewer for the Shoah Foundation in Berlin. In March 1996, she moved from Berlin to Los Angeles to work for the Foundation in the cataloguing department. Jungblut describes the setup of the interviewing method and project design as well as some of the project's results and effects. She also discusses the reasons for using video rather than audio in recording the interviews. Jungblut concludes by talking about the Institute's current and future projects.

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