

“ They also say: ‘My life is proof that Hitler didn't win.’”  
 Dr. Roy Schwartzman

The testimony of Holocaust survivors and witnesses has been well documented. But because scholars have focused on gathering a definitive record of survivors' wartime experience, relatively little attention has been paid to how that experience shaped the rest of their lives.

Dr. Roy Schwartzman, professor of communication studies, wants to change that.

"We have very little idea of how these people were crafting their lives as a result of living through the Holocaust," Schwartzman said. "I'm not trying to look inside their heads, but instead I'm seeing what they're offering in their communication that tells us what resources they bring to bear as survivors, as witnesses."

Through his AfterWords Project, he is collecting and analyzing oral histories from North Carolinians who lived through the Holocaust, as well as analyzing testimony collected in archives elsewhere.

His previous academic work on the Holocaust focused on analyzing Nazi propaganda. But a few years ago, Schwartzman asked himself, "OK, what about the other side of this?"

"The world is different after monumental events like the Holocaust," he said. "What do we do with that? And that's where this whole research begins."

Since starting the field work in 2007, he's interviewed more than a dozen North Carolinians, whose experiences range from surviving concentration camps or forced-labor camps to living in hiding or helping others escape the Nazis. He begins every interview with the

same broad question: "Starting with liberation (or the end of your Holocaust experience) how did you get from there to here and now talking to me?"

"And often that's all I need to do," he said.

Schwartzman then looks for common themes and metaphors in the stories that emerge from those interviews. One theme, he says, is that of a "public and passionate patriotism." His interview subjects see being an American as "a way of controlling your own destiny," Schwartzman said.

Through AfterWords, Schwartzman is also developing teacher education materials and a web site. The North Carolina Holocaust Education Research and Outreach, or NCHERO, project will provide multimedia resources that profile survivors and witnesses who settled in the state. It will also have a section devoted to refuting Holocaust denial. In a later phase, it will also include a place where Holocaust educators and others can blog and share information. The project has received grants from the N.C. Council on the Holocaust, and it is also receives support from the N.C. Center for the Advancement of Teaching. UNCG also provides undergraduate research assistants, who transcribe the interviews and prepare field notes of archived testimonies.

"The deadline we're facing here is one of us entering the twilight of that generation," Schwartzman said. "(This) may be one of the last opportunities to gather testimony or update testimony that's already been given and to find testimony that has not been collected thus far."

