

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN TESTIMONY

Dr Bea Lewkowicz, Director of *AJR Refugees Voices and Project Lead Holocaust Testimony UK*, introduces two new projects which bring Holocaust testimony to new audiences.

In recent years Holocaust educators worldwide have hotly debated the future usages of Holocaust testimony. These discussions involve looking at the potential benefits of social media and AI, as well as questions about the danger of these new technologies for Holocaust distortion and denial.

It is clear that for archives of Holocaust testimonies, such as our own *Refugee Voices* archive, new technologies can provide better access to the many hours of recordings, while social media platforms can increase the educational reach of the collected testimonies and radically expand our audiences.

The AJR has recently launched two innovative projects which exemplify how new technologies can help to 'activate' archives: the **Holocaust Testimony UK portal** and the digital exhibition **80 Objects/80 Lives**. The portal is a database driven website which provides easy access to entire, unedited interviews which have been recorded by different institutions in the last 45 years, offering a wonderful resource for researchers as well as family members of interviewees.

The 80 Objects/80 Lives exhibition focuses on the micro history of 80 different objects, each belonging to a different Holocaust survivor. It has been created using footage from recorded interviews with 80 different UK-based Holocaust survivors and refugees, 68 from our own *Refugee Voices* archive and 12 recorded for the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation.

Each exhibit focuses on one particular object which has been treasured by its owner, with a video clip lasting from 30 seconds to two minutes. The language of

social media facilitates a close encounter with the story behind the object, allowing viewers to zoom in on the special meaning it holds for its owner.

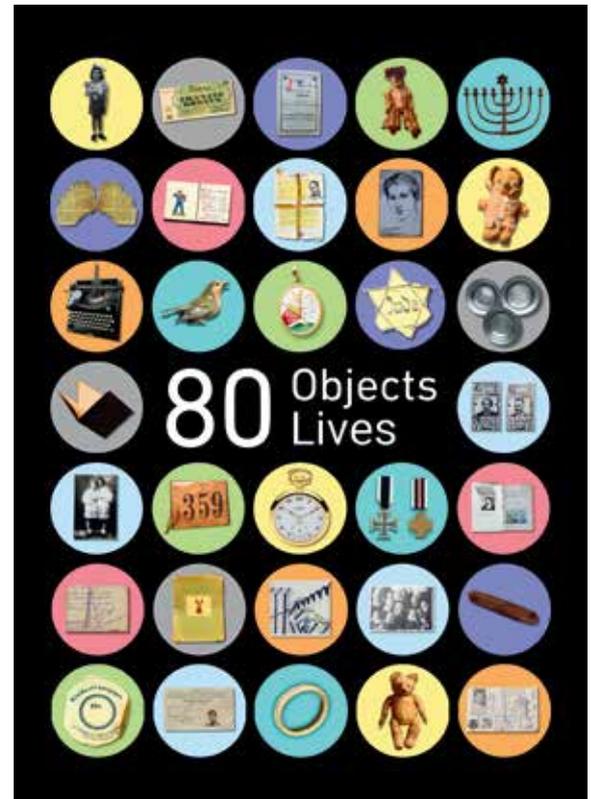
The objects include (among others) a Kiddush cup (Henry Wuga MBE), a spoon (Peter Summerfield BEM), a grinder (Susan Pollock MBE), a doll (Gerta Regensburger), teddy bears (John Hajdu MBE and Eve Willman MBE), a Kindertransport visa (Kurt Marx BEM), a ring (Ruth Sands), a watch (Michael Heppner), and a false birth certificate (Gertrud Friedmann).

Some objects are remnants of a lost world, while others, such as a passport with the letter J, a yellow star (Laszlo Roman, Tom Keve, Fanni Bogdanow), a bowl from Bergen-Belsen (Zahava Kohn MBE), a powder box from Lodz ghetto (Helen Aronson BEM), act as material witnesses of atrocities and persecution.

These 80 items – be they artefacts, photographs, documents or household items – create a tangible link to the lives of each testimony giver; to the 'before' of a disrupted past and the traumatic experience of discrimination, exclusion, persecution, emigration, and survival. The objects are the carriers of memory, helping the interviewees to feel better connected with their lost family members, communities and other possessions, as well as with specific moments in their own life journeys.

The chosen objects are presented in eight sections, according to broader themes:

1. Objects from Before.
2. Autograph Albums
3. Objects of Persecution
4. Objects of Emigration
5. Objects of New Lives
6. Camps and Ghetto Objects
7. Protection and Refuge Objects
8. Liberation and Post-War Objects.



Interviewee Peter Summerfield BEM, who escaped to the UK on one of the last trains from Berlin in 1939, and who is featured with his spoon in the section on 'Objects from Before', tells us why the spoon is important to him:

'The spoon was hidden in the hand luggage and that's why it survived. When we reached England we just had our hand luggage and nothing else. It has sentimental value for me. It is just a spoon but it has a lot of meaning attached to it'.

As Sara Bloomfield, Director of the United States Holocaust Museum, commented: "Each artefact is a witness [...], a testament to lives interrupted, and a call to remember."

The aim of 80 Objects/80 Lives is to make the history of the Holocaust more relatable by focusing on everyday objects using the language and imagery of social media. We hope that it will be further developed into a teaching resource for schools.

You can see the full exhibition here: <https://www.holocausttestimony.org.uk/80-objects>

If you would like to tell us about your treasured object, please write to the *AJR Journal*.

Dr Bea Lewkowicz