



# Displaced Childhoods: Oral History and Traumatic Experiences

Oral History Society Annual Conference  
Southampton Solent University  
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# ABSTRACTS

## **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

**Dr Joanna Sassoon,**

**Project Manager of the *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*  
at the National Library of Australia**

***'Complicating the story through oral history'***

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**Professor Lynn Abrams (University of Glasgow),**

**author of *The Orphan Country: Children of Scotland's Broken Homes* and *Oral History Theory***

***'Practicing what I preach: revisiting the narratives of child welfare in Britain through the life story perspective'***

In 1996-7 I conducted a series of interviews with individuals who had spent their childhood in the care system - either boarded out or in children's homes. This lecture revisits those interviews through the prism of theoretical perspectives on the creation of autobiographical narratives. This research has informed social work practice with looked after children today. The understanding that in order to develop a coherent and composed sense of self one has to have an autobiographical story is widely accepted and indeed has become enshrined in social work policy towards looked after children. So the question to be addressed here is, how do respondents who have experienced traumatic and disrupted childhoods compose and narrate the autobiographical self? This is not a new question for child care practitioners but it may be for historians who have to grapple with the problem of memory and the issues surrounding how adults recall their childhoods. I hope to offer some suggestions as to how individuals employ different narrative strategies to achieve autobiographical composure.

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## **ABSTRACTS**

### **SHARING PAINFUL MEMORIES WHEN MEMORY IS FADING: AN INTERGENERATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Isilda Almeida-Harvey, East Sussex Record Office; Sarah Hitchings and Jenny Stewart,  
Spoken Memoirs**

In 2009 East Sussex Record Office was awarded funding from the Museums Libraries and Archives Council to deliver a Their Past Your Future (TPYF) Project. Our brief was to deliver an intergenerational programme using archives as the starting point to explore the impact of the Second World War on the lives of communities in East Sussex.

The project took place between March and June 2010 and it was delivered by ESRO's Outreach and Learning Officer and three Oral Historians. It involved 83 Year 5 and 6 Primary School students, 3 volunteers from the Lewes District Older People's Forum, 7 teachers and teaching assistants.

We anticipated that subjects such as evacuation, separation and fear might emerge; we planned for how we would deliver the Oral History training to the children; we talked about what archives to use and how; and we organised activities that helped the different generations to bond. Nevertheless, the fact that one of the older people had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's meant that there was an urgency to keep remembering, and most of all sharing, some of the most important moments in his life. Those were also the most traumatic and upsetting to him.

Our paper will discuss the challenges that have arisen from delivering a project where the brief was precisely the sharing of personal childhood stories around the experience of conflict. We will be focusing on how that was managed in a classroom environment; the ethical challenges emerging from the difficulty in anticipating and "controlling" what was shared particularly when working with an interviewee with dementia; how to frame the learning around making connections and developing empathy when working with children, in particular when they are the interviewers.

We will approach the methodology by explaining how planning for the delivery of this project was done and how we then adapted according to the needs of participants (interviewees and children). We will also discuss our decision to offer each of the interviewees the opportunity for a longer life history interview with an oral historian at the end of the project.

We will draw out some of the key outcomes for the various participants by looking at the specific impact on the interviewees, the children and their teachers.

We will be supporting our paper with the findings from the Project's Qualitative Evaluation Report, by including extracts from the Oral History interviews and presenting how we planned the project.

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## **'ON THE MOVE': NARRATIVES OF WARTIME EVACUATION TO STAFFORDSHIRE**

**Maggie Andrews, University of Worcester**

The wartime evacuee – a small child with label, gas mask and suitcase at railway station has become of a symbol the home front in World War Two, however behind the iconic image lies a range of more emotionally complex histories of evacuation as children and parents coped with separation and loss, both at the time and in the years after.

The need to create narratives which can help explain parent's acquiesce in their separation from their children has become more acute as social and cultural attitudes to childhood at the end of the twentieth century have elevated bonds between parents and children. WW2 governmental discourses, school and academic histories, popular representations of the evacuation in film, fiction, documentary and autobiography have contributed to the lexicon of possible explanations which individuals can draw upon to narrativise their own past; to explain what now may seem unexplainable - the mass separation of children from their parents and homes.

This paper draws upon research generated by a Heritage Lottery Funded project 'On the Move' which explored evacuation to Staffordshire in WW2 and was carried out by Staffordshire Record Office and Staffordshire Museum Service in 2009-12 and generated over 90 oral history interviews. It will suggest that these oral history interviews reveal a number of common narratives which, whilst perhaps of questionable accuracy, convey attempts to navigate different emotional reactions and explanations for the trauma of wartime evacuation.

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## **CONCEPTUALIZING TRAUMA IN A POST-IMPERIAL AGE: THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON CHILD MIGRANT LIFE HISTORIES**

**Ellen Boucher, Amherst College, USA**

Over the past decade, the history of British child migration has attracted considerable media and political attention, especially in the wake of the 2009 and 2010 Australian and British government apologies to these and other "forgotten children." A number of tropes have dominated this public discussion: that the removal of children from their natal homes was inherently traumatic, that their institutionalization in farm schools and orphanages left lasting emotional scars, that the severing of familial ties has disrupted their identity formation, causing many to feel lost or "incomplete." This paper examines how these narratives have shaped the ways that former child migrants frame their life histories and position themselves in the world. It centers on a comparison of two sets of postwar child migrants: the familiar case of the roughly three thousand boys and girls sent to Australia, and the less well-known story of the nearly three hundred children sent to the Rhodesia Fairbridge Memorial College in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Based on forty oral history interviews with former child migrants that I conducted in 2005, 2006, and 2009, as well as research in the oral history collections of the National Library of Australia, the Battye Library, and the State Library of New South Wales, it focuses on the views of former migrants who feel their experiences do not fit the model of dislocation and loss that dominates the current understanding of child migration. For these individuals, the close public association between child migration and trauma has been less liberating than constraining. It has often forced them to reevaluate their memories of childhood, and has limited their ability to articulate other sources of emotional

distress, such as their feelings of statelessness in the wake of the eclipse of the British empire and the transition to the post-imperial era.

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## **CHILDREN AND WAR: ORAL HISTORY AND CHILDREN IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, THE CASE OF ASTURIAS.**

**Amaya Caunedo Domínguez, Universidad de Oviedo, Spain**

Asturias used to be a mining and industrial region by the Cantabrian sea, on the north of Spain. Department of History at University of Oviedo, and AFOHSA (Oral Archive for Social History of Asturias), have been working together on the project: "Voices from the past". The project started on 2003, and it developed many different materials: a whole oral history testimonies collection at the AFOHSA, a map of common graves in Asturias, and a data base with more than 25.000 entries of persons who died in Asturias because of war and political repression.

Part of survivors who where interviewee, were children during the Spanish civil war, and it is quite interesting to try to do a comparative work on their different histories: how displacement changed their lives, was it better to go or to stay? Post-war repression through children's eyes. In this paper we want to analyse and compare children testimonies from AFOHSA and "Voices from the past". Displacement abroad, internal displacement (usually to Cataluña), having to stay at home during the post-war repression, returning to a completely destroyed and stolen house, compose all together a child's reality of war.

With this paper we want to discuss and ponder with colleagues from abroad about war and displacement during childhood, trying to find differences or similarities through history and geography.

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**WHAT'S A DISRUPTED AND TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD GOT TO DO WITH IT? EXPLORING THERAPEUTIC WAYS OF WORKING WITH THE CONCEPTS OF SELF AND IDENTITY IN ADULTHOOD FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED CHILDHOOD DISRUPTION**

**Divine Charura, Leeds Metropolitan University**

In this Paper I will explore and address the continual development of “the concept of self” from Childhood, drawing from the complex nature of disrupted and traumatic childhoods and their possible ramifications in adolescent and adult life. Focus will be on the complexities, challenges and sensitivity of exploring individual’s narratives, the effects that evacuation, forced migration, long-term separation and the process of asylum seeking can have on children in my psychotherapeutic work with children of asylum seeker, and Refugee families. The majority of individuals I work with have experienced multiple levels of loss and bereavements through war, conflict and other atrocities. In this paper I will explore the methodology I use of traumatic narrative/experience tracking and psychotherapeutic skills in working with psychological and emotional distress.

I will suggest from my experience 10 points as a way of working and approaching the sensitive issues around trauma and recalling childhood selves when working with adults who experienced trauma in their childhood. I will draw some theoretical content and concepts from different literature including some from oral history and systemic theory. I acknowledge in this paper that oral history and trauma affects and influence young people’s lives.

Furthermore I argue that for anyone, Trauma and disruption also impacts on the concept of self and if met with further disruption, discrimination or lack of acceptance can contribute to psychological distress. This raises the question of: What does this mean for those professions working with children and adults who have experienced disrupted and traumatic childhoods? The paper in concluding will address the link between oral history, and the importance of revisiting traumatic and disrupted childhoods in a sensitive and systematic approach. It will stress the importance of developing a therapeutic service in which such professional and important work can occur.

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## **ORAL HISTORY AND TRAUMA – THE CHILDREN’S ORPHANAGE AT NORWOOD**

**Lawrence Cohen, Southampton University**

Trauma is an experience associated with the individual. In the institutional setting of an orphanage oral history provides the basis for identifying a collective experience that is also defined as trauma. In the comparison with the normality of family life for bringing up children orphanage life constituted an aberration. It is in the damaging impact that affected so many children that the condition – institutional trauma is recognised.

Traumatic experience is identified at three stages of orphanage life of the child. The child could enter the institution from the age of five and stay there until 14. The initial impact on admission was for some recollected as distressing. The trauma of admission was the experience of being transferred from the familiarity of the outside world to one where life was now confined within the ‘total institution’.

After the initial impact the child’s stay at Norwood could last up to nine years. The orphanage was built by Jewish philanthropists and served as a substitute home for orphans from 1876 to 1961. The experience of the stay was individual to each child but from it the sociologist Irving Goffman identified four forms of adaptation. One of these was ‘situational withdrawal’ in which for one boy the institutional experience made him feel ‘the sad little victim’. The final stage, leaving with re-entry into the outside world now that the child was an adolescent created its own trauma. The totality of the experience throughout the formative period of childhood at the orphanage was the legacy that was to haunt some of the children throughout adult life.

The experience of the children recollected by them decades later reveals a narrative that had previously been hidden. It was an alternative to an official version. The value of oral history is a history that adds to a fuller understanding of the life of the orphans. From the archives and recollections four narratives are distinguished – an official institutional version, the individual accounts of former children, and an editorial view found in the pages of the *Newsletter* published by the Old Scholars Association. The historian is able to construct a historical narrative that incorporates both archival and oral history. This narrative

encompasses the experiences of the children that were ‘disturbed, disrupted and traumatic’ and allows a judgement to be made on whether the institution was ‘good enough’ for the children.

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## **“WHAT MATTERS IS NOT THE LENGTH OF THE LIFE LIVED BUT THE DEPTH”: RECORDING THE LIFE STORIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH LIFE-LIMITING CONDITIONS**

**Kerry Davies, Helen and Douglas House Hospices**

This paper seeks to examine the practical, methodological and ethical issues around setting up an archive capturing the life stories and experiences of the children, young people and families who use Helen and Douglas House. Helen House was established thirty years ago as the world’s first children’s hospice; Douglas House opened in 2004 as the world’s first hospice for young adults. Both work to support those with life-limiting conditions, and their families, in a range of ways.

Children and young people with life-limiting conditions experience disruption and displacement due to experiences of disability, periods of ill-health, treatment or hospitalisation, times of bereavement and loss, and changing diagnosis and prognosis. Families’ lives are altered by the practical, physical, emotional and financial impact of caring for their child or children. The rich and fluctuating stories of such children, young people and families are also ‘forgotten’ in that they can be masked by simplified publicly acceptable narratives of sick and dying children and their families.

Setting up an archive would enable Helen and Douglas House – through the use of oral history – to establish a permanent record of the experiences of children, young people and families in their own words (or, as many of those we work with have learning and physical disabilities, through other ways of storytelling).

This paper will explore the practicalities of setting up an archive in the wider context of our two hospices, as well as the methodological and ethical issues involved. It will seek to understand the experience of recording potentially traumatic narratives of childhood, and to

examine issues of participation, as well as the relationships between different storytellers (child, parent, institution). It will consider the value and uses of such an archive, as well as the role of such storytelling within the overall therapeutic contexts of the hospices.

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## ***EN ROUTE TO A NATIONAL MYTH: CHILDREN IN THE 1940 EXODUS AND THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY***

**Lindsey Dodd, University of Huddersfield**

My doctoral research analysed the Allied bombing of France during World War II. Described as ‘the last black hole in French collective memory’, bombing is absent from dominant discourse on World War II in France. As such, it has no mythic power, no ‘cultural script’. But during my research, which drew on interviews with adults who lived through the war as children, I was confronted with the powerful collective memory of the traumatic civilian exodus of 1940.

As the Wehrmacht invaded, perhaps eight million French civilians fled their homes. Many interviewees remembered the exodus of May-June 1940 – often a short displacement – more vividly than being heavily bombed four years later. Why is one ordeal remembered with more clarity than the other? I will suggest that the lasting impact of this childhood refugee experience derives from its status in contemporary and later public discourse. The vast internal migration has been the subject of historical study, popular novels and films from 1940 to the present. It is represented widely, publicly, and using a standard set of narrative components. It is my contention that the exodus is *en route* to becoming a national myth.

Yet it is still *en route*; collective memory can distort lived experience in the past like a jelly mould, shaping personal memories to its own contours. But the jelly is not yet set. Child participants in the exodus are still remembering and still telling their stories, using various narrative devices to negotiate gaps between their own memories and the ‘approved’ version of the story. There exist alternative *exodes* which challenge such well-established plot components as geographical provenance, destination, duration, violence and hardship.

While the Allied bombing of France is narrated in heterogeneous ways, unfettered by the demands of a collective memory which has ignored it, former child refugees who remember the exodus of 1940 are coming closer to remembering the myth.

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## **ADULT CARE LEAVERS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, IDENTITY AND THE LIFE COURSE**

**Zachari Duncalf, University of Strathclyde**

The experience of growing up in and leaving public care has life long ramifications for many adult care leavers. The lack of belonging, a place to locate identity and a sense of knowing who they are and where they have come from have all been outlined as central issues that many adult care leavers struggle with. Whilst many people have security in the above, in part due to the oral histories that are passed down from family members, care leavers are often displaced by the lack of geographical or emotional base to call home.

This presentation explores the autobiographical interviews that were gathered for a PhD with 25 care leavers from around the UK aged 25 – 72. This research was grounded in a previous scoping study undertaken by the presenter (Listen Up! 310 Adult Care Leavers Speak Out). From this study it was clear that more in-depth and narrative driven research was needed. The oral histories gathered from the 25 care leavers not only tell us something about a generation of care which has often gone un-researched, due to the focus on young people in care and young care leavers, but also offers a unique insight and reflection upon the impact of a childhood in care long into adulthood.

This presentation therefore has two main aims. The first is to outline the ethical dilemmas and practice of carrying out the autobiographical interviews and second to provide examples of the rich data gathered from this research along with the conscientious decisions made about how this data was represented.

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## **ORAL HISTORY IN A TEMPORARY RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY**

**Gemma Geldart, The Planned Environment Therapy Trust**

Throughout the 'Therapeutic Living with Other People's Children' project, the archive 'weekend' has played a central role, where former children and adults from now closed therapeutic communities have come together over the course of a few days to discuss their experiences and work on their archives. It has been against the backdrop of these reunion events that most of our oral history recordings have taken place. This paper will explore this method of collecting oral histories and recording memory. Particular attention will be given to the relationship between interviewee and interviewer in this context, the process of group remembering as well as the role of the 'weekend' itself. Further, it will consider the oral history processes outside the 'weekends', the emphasis on, and evolution of, participant relationships with each other and with the team and the outcomes this has produced.

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## **LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT THE VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN THEIR LIVES**

**Roger Grimshaw, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies**

This presentation will address methodological, ethical and theoretical issues in oral narrative under the conference theme of children who have grown up in violent households. It concerns itself with reflections on a project that enabled young people convicted of grave crimes as children to tell the stories of their childhoods and to have them published anonymously. These accounts relate episodes of domestic violence, sexual abuse, bereavement, separation and disturbed family lives. The research was conducted in prisons using biographical narrative interview methods. The interviews were transcribed, edited and agreed with the young people before publication on the internet in 2011.

The research explored the psychotherapeutic interpretation of childhood violence as a manifestation of disorganised patterns of attachment. Psychotherapists were part of the research team at each stage, and the presentation will discuss the influence of psychotherapeutic perspectives on the interpretation of memories and the identification of trauma and disorganised attachment in the stories. Using extracts from the stories, the

presentation will illustrate how the methods used elicited evidence consistent with this interpretation.

The presentation is intended to contribute to dialogue between practitioners in different disciplines of oral narrative including psychotherapy, oral history and life history.

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## **EARLY DISPLACEMENT AND TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE: THE CHILDREN OF YUGOSLAVIA IN THE 1990S**

**Emina Hadziosmanovic, University of Nottingham**

The aim of the present research is to investigate the long-term psychological, social, and environmental effects of displacement in refugees from former Yugoslavia, more specifically to look at *children of war*, those who came to the UK as children to escape the Bosnian war 1992-1995. This group will be studied alongside a comparison group of similar-aged Bosnian children, who did not escape the war and still remain in Bosnia today. Semi-structured interviews will be administered to both groups, with questions targeted to assess: life in the UK/Bosnia, feelings of identity and belonging, attachment to Bosnia, experiences during the war, historical understanding and personal perceptions of the causes of the civil war, social relations with Serbs both pre and post-war, and psychological functioning/ well-being after war.

Interviews will be conducted in the English and Bosnian language, translated, and transcribed for a thematic analysis to take place. Comparisons across the two groups will be made based on the main themes, psychological, social and environmental impact of war. Fifteen children of war will be interviewed in London and Birmingham, and fifteen children of war in Bosnia & Herzegovina, predominately in Sarajevo. Each participant will also complete the Impact of Event Scale Revised (IES-R), to ascertain their level of psychological functioning and to test for any war-related PTSD symptoms. Interviews will take place between April and June 2012. Implications for service development will be made in relation to factors affecting external displacement of refugees from former Yugoslavia to the UK and internally displaced individuals within Bosnia & Herzegovina.

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## **'SNAPSHOTS OF CANADA': MEMORIES FROM BRITISH CHILD EVACUEES SENT TO CANADA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

**Claire L Halstead, University of Western Ontario, Canada**

Using oral accounts, this paper will examine the experiences of former British child evacuees who were sent to Canada during the Second World War. It is widely understood that to protect Britain's youngest generation from the aerial onslaughts of war, thousands of children were removed from their homes, separated from their families and sent to foreign countries. Yet, it is seldom acknowledged by historians that, of all the Commonwealth nations, Canada received the most British child evacuees. To give British children a safe haven, Canada opened its border to 1,532 state-sponsored children and thousands of privately-sponsored children.

Oral accounts from former Canada-bound evacuees such as that of Yorkshire native John D. Haikings, illuminate the multifaceted experience of long-term separation from family and trans-Atlantic migration due to warfare. Although they are individual accounts, these oral testimonies, taken together shed light on themes of empire, acceptance and identity. The complexity of the evacuee experience is exemplified by the trauma of separation, exacerbated by the misperception of a short-term evacuation, the struggles of settling into foster families and the inability to even recognise one's own parents upon return.

These accounts show the evacuees' reflections of their experience which culminate in their lasting sense of identity. Haikings' account elucidates the difficulty of being displaced again by returning to and attempting to resettle in Britain. For some there were feelings of no longer belonging in Britain. Haikings, like other evacuees, returned to Canada in the immediate post-war years to become a Canadian citizen. Overall, the aging and passing of these former evacuees means that this subject is fading from living memory; oral history is an effective method to capture it. Ultimately, this paper will illuminate the British child evacuee experience in Canada and will consequently further our understanding of children in war.

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## **DOUBLE EXPOSURE: TRACES OF CHILDHOOD IN INTERVIEWS WITH JEWISH REFUGEES FROM AUSTRIA**

**Bea Lewkowicz, IGRS, University of London**

In this paper I would like to present the oral history project entitled 'Double Exposure: Jewish Refugees from Austria in the UK', which deals with the life histories of Jewish refugees, who came to the UK – mostly as children - after 1938, following the 'Anschluss', the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany.

I will explore the ways childhood is represented in the interviews and look for the traces of childhood memories in the narratives of the by now elderly interviewees. On the one hand, I will investigate which fragments of childhood are narrated by the interviewees and on the other hand I will investigate how childhood memories affect later experiences of the interviewees, such as the return to Austria as adults. Lastly, I will also present any general reflections on the theme of childhood, found in the interviews with Jewish refugees from Austria.

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## **WITNESS ME: TELLING AND WRITING TRAUMATIC AUTO/BIOGRAPHICAL STORIES IN A CREATIVE AND HEALING WAY**

**Dvora Liberman**

How do we work with traumatic stories through oral history, life writing and performance in a creative and healing way, and avoid re-traumatisation?

This presentation offers a guide of good practice for working with traumatic auto/biographical stories. The guide is grounded in Judith Lewis Herman's psychotherapeutic model of recovery from trauma, and draws on the research, ideas and practices of prominent writers, storytellers/performers, psychotherapists and trauma theorists including Joyce Kornblatt and Louise de Salvo.

Dvora Liberman has conducted many oral history interviews with people who have been severely traumatised such as Aboriginal Elders in Australia who were forcibly removed from their families as children, young refugees and asylum seekers living in immigration detention centres, women who survived the siege of Sarajevo, and people who were children during wartime.

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## **TRANSCRIBING – LISTENING TO THE TEARS**

**Chris Long, The Planned Environment Therapy Trust**

I have had a privileged insight into the area of disrupted and traumatic childhoods, meeting and talking with many people who had experienced emotional difficulties, physical and/or emotional trauma in childhood. At the events we held, I witnessed first hand the importance of being able to tell your story to an unbiased audience; and not only to tell it, but then to have a CD of the recording and a typed, verbatim transcript of the oral history interview.

The paper will discuss use of punctuation, and how a comma in the wrong (or is it wrong?) place can completely distort meaning. I will talk about the concept of transcribing being a lot more than 'copy typing'. The transcriber should listen, understand, and absorb the tone and pace of the interview, pick up laughter, irony and tears. I even had the chance to interview people myself, which opened up a whole new outlook on the connection between the oral interviews and transcribing.

The person transcribing, in my opinion, holds equal responsibility with the Oral Historian to present and portray the interview in the clearest, truest and most honest way possible. I have had the most privileged experience of interviewing an elderly lady, and then transcribing what turned out to be an emotional and heart-rending interview. The weight of responsibility I feel I hold in respect of this interview is immense. Should I feel this responsibility? After all, I didn't force her to allow me to interview her. I asked her to tell me, whatever she wanted to tell me, about her life. I didn't ask her to tell me things she had never told anyone before. I knew the places where she cried, but she cried silently. If I hadn't have conducted this interview, would I have heard her tears?

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## **FOUNDLING VOICES**

**Sarah Lowry and Alison Duke, The Foundling Museum**

Foundling Voices is an oral history project, run by the Foundling Museum, focusing on individuals who were cared for by the Foundling Hospital in the first half of the twentieth century. Each person that participated experienced the same pattern of care in childhood that the Foundling Hospital had followed since the mid-eighteenth century. They entered the institution as babies, were given a new foundling name, and then fostered with families outside London. They returned to the institution at the age of five for their schooling, before being apprenticed out in their mid teens. The project interviewed 92 people including 75 former pupils.

Careful consideration was given to the process of recruiting interviewees, how they were interviewed and the follow-up procedures. Support for the planning stages and the interview process was given by Coram (the current-day name for the Foundling Hospital) and they had different priorities and ethical considerations to the Foundling Voices project team. This meant that the project sparked discussions on ethical questions right from the beginning and these discussions continued throughout.

Key ethical areas of concern included the well-being of the interviewees (considered by some at Coram to be 'vulnerable adults'), the responsibility to each participant to tell their story, the reputation of Coram today as the charity which ran the Foundling Hospital, and how to balance these with the requirements of the Foundling Voices project and the Foundling Museum's commitment to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This paper will focus on the ethical questions raised and how these considerations were dealt with in the project's set-up and the interviewing process.

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## LEARNING FROM TRAUMA: PUTTING PAIN TO WORK

Carolyn Mears, University of Denver, USA

The shattering world of trauma comes in many forms. For some, it's natural disaster that devastates their community. For others, it's human activity—either intentional or accidental. It may be a flood that destroys a village, a radical with a bomb strapped to his chest, a government persecuting “undesirables,” or an abusive parent violating a single child. The list of traumatic exposures and the hardships they cause is long, and children are especially vulnerable.

OH methods allow us to better understand traumatic events and what can be done to help. This presentation introduces my current study, *Reclaiming School in the Aftermath of Trauma: Advice Based on Experience* (Palgrave, 2012), for which I invited people to share their traumatic experience, the challenges they faced, and their suggestions for helping others. Contributors include individuals impacted Hurricane Katrina, the terrorist attack of September 11, school shootings (e.g., Virginia Tech; Jokela, Finland), and personal abuse (bullying/violation).

My own encounter with trauma began when my son's high school, Columbine, was attacked by two students. Afterward, our community witnessed an increase in depression, PTSD, substance abuse, family strife, divorce, and even suicide. Some students dropped out of school, yet others continued with their education and life plans. To learn what helped and what hindered recovery, I combined OH interviewing with innovative strategies to meet the heightened need for sensitivity, producing a distinctive approach for research. This model (*Gateway Approach*, 2009) has been used in other settings, providing positive and sometimes therapeutic outcomes.

This presentation shares some of the wisdom born of trauma about what helps children, schools, and communities recover from traumatic loss. Trauma offers lessons, and as Holocaust survivor Gerda Weissman Klein admonishes, pain should never be wasted.

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## **IN THE MEMORY OF CONVOY Y**

**Yoram Mouchenik, University Toulouse le Mirail, France**

Jewish children who survived Nazis persecutions and French collaboration while being hidden, were confronted with multiple traumatizations. Becoming adult, parents and grandparents, some of them have gathered recently founding an association to honour and transmit the memory of their parents deported by the same convoy in 1942 and killed at Auschwitz. We question, here, the specific suffering of these “hidden children” and the contemporary dynamic impulses by their association with several goals and activities. This research was more like a journey with a group of ex hidden children (now sixty-seventy years old and more) for four years, following all their activities, knowing that that they gathered together not for their own sake but to celebrate the memory of their mother, father and relatives. During my research with them I made several interviews with sixteen of them. It raises questions about this group and how to deal sensitive issues and interviewing adults recalling their very traumatic childhood.

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## **CAN ORAL HISTORY RECORD TRAUMA?**

**Alicia Pozo-Gutierrez and Padmini Broomfield, University of Southampton**

Drawing on data from the project, Los Niños – Child Exiles of the Spanish Civil War, led by the University of Southampton and funded by the UK Heritage Lottery Fund, this paper explores the long-term impact that war and evacuation had on former child evacuees taken to Britain during the Spanish conflict. The paper questions the extent to which oral history can be considered an adequate tool to detect and record trauma in the context of war and displaced childhoods.

In May 1937, 3826 children were evacuated to Britain fleeing the bombing of the Basque Country in northern Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). They were part of a movement which saw more than 30,000 children evacuated from the war zone to countries across Europe and the Americas. The victory of Franco’s rebels in Spain and later, the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe prevented many of them from returning home.

By 1945 around 250 remained, unable or unwilling to return to Franco's dictatorial regime and eventually settled in Britain.

Our paper presents different types of narratives that have emerged from 30 in-depth life history interviews carried out in Britain, Spain and France, during which the former evacuees remembered and reflected upon their memories of conflict, war and displacement.

Through analysis of factual reconstructions of events that occurred 75 years ago, testimonial accounts that bear witness to instances of war violence, and reflective passages in which the interviewees discuss the impact that evacuation and resettlement had on their adult lives, we explore possible ways of transcending the dominant interpretive dichotomy of children as 'victims' or 'survivors'.

The project, in collaboration with Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, has resulted in an archive deposited at the Special Collections Library at the University of Southampton, an educational resources pack and a publication, *Look after him: Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War*.

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## **'IT WAS STRICT. FULL STOP.' GATHERING STORIES OF GROWING UP IN CARE UNDER LATE SOCIALISM**

**Jennifer Rasell, Centre for Contemporary History, Potsdam, Germany**

How can we come to information on violence in care through oral history? How to describe the research interest to informants and what questions to ask? The legacy of abuse in institutions has coloured the way we approach the topic of children in care. It is therefore particularly important that participants have some control over the focus and direction of the research, which might not 'come to the point' expected. Violence needs to be understood according to participants' own evaluation and interpretations *at the time*. What was unquestioned everyday practice might now retrospectively be viewed as violent. My paper addresses these methodological issues and shares experiences of interviewing ten former children in care, who grew up in 1980s Hungary.

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**“THIS EIGHT YEAR OLD, HE’S TOO LITTLE”: MOURNING AS AGENCY IN CHILDHOOD  
MEMORIES OF THE 1947 INDIAN PARTITION**

**Anindya Raychaudhuri, University College London**

This paper draws on an oral history project on memories of the 1947 Indian partition. Since the events of partition happened 64 years ago, almost all of my participants acquired their memories as children. As such, their testimonies are marked in interesting ways by their perceived outsider-status. This is manifested in different ways from a reluctance to talk because of a belief that their memories are of less importance, to a sophisticated and nuanced analysis of the relationship between their own childhood selves and the adults who were empowered to make important, life-changing decisions for them. Even when my participants were born after partition, their childhood has been materially transformed by actions of their adult relations – from decisions to either stay or move to a different country, to the ways in which stories of trauma and violence were passed on to them. Borrowing from theoretical work on trauma, loss and mourning by scholars such as Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, and David Eng, this paper argues that in these cases, mourning can be seen as an example of agency, through which the child can stake a claim to both the traumatic experience and its painful memory. By choosing to mourn, the child is able to take part in events, and resist being reduced to simply non-participating witnesses or victims. An oral history archive of childhood memories can, I argue, be used as a corrective to the ways in which, to borrow from Marianne Hirsch’s work, the child has often been constructed as ‘an unexamined emblem of vulnerability and innocence’ (Hirsch 1999: 16).

**Bibliography**

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**FAMILY SECRECY AND A PARENT'S SHOCKING EXPERIENCES: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF MY GRANDFATHER'S EXPERIENCES IN A WWII CONCENTRATION CAMP AND SOME OF ITS EFFECTS ON FAMILY LIFE.**

**Peter Rober, Institute for Family and Sexuality Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium**

When I was a child I knew my grandfather had been imprisoned in a concentration camp for war prisoners in Austria during part of WWII. However, nobody talked about it.

This was the starting point for an autoethnographic study, trying to understand family secrecy and its effect on children and grandchildren growing up. Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach in which a researcher explores his/her own personal experiences, connecting it to wider cultural, political, and social concerns. The researcher "incorporates the 'I' into research and writing, yet analyses self as if studying the 'other'" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p.148). In my study, in addition to self-observation and reflexivity, I interviewed several family members, and I analyzed relevant documents (e.g. the letters my grandfather wrote to his family while he was in the camp).

In this presentation, I will tell the story of my study, connecting its findings with the literature on family secrecy (Rober, Walraevens, & Versteijnen, in press). Furthermore I will reflect on some of the complexities of doing autoethnographic research. I will also focus on the paradox of studying family secrecy; in the sense that the researcher invites the participants to talk about what one is not allowed to talk about.

References:

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## **OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN: PERFORMANCE HAPPENS**

**Stephen Steinhaus, Trinity Catholic School, Leamington Spa**

*Dear Students,*

*RE: Performance Project: Other People's Children*

*I am writing to invite you to join in an intense, innovative and exciting project based here at Trinity Catholic School but touring next year. I am looking for a huge range of students to work on devising and creating an interactive, multi-media and multi-disciplinary performance piece based on the stories of children and staff from a number of care homes in the UK from 1930-1980. We will be working with stories that have, until now, remained largely untold. We will need everything from actors to technicians, designers, writers, historians, students of psychology, dancers, artists...even engineers!*

*We have been commissioned to produce the piece by the Planned Environment Therapy Trust and the project will require a serious commitment from you. We will initially meet every Thursday after-school from 3.30-4.30 but will also have a number of weekend and residential sessions as well as at least 3 days in the summer of 2011 preparing the piece. If the project interests you please sign up with me by returning the slip below to me by Monday the 15th of November and attending the preliminary meeting at Lunch on Wednesday 17th November. Maybe even more importantly, come and see me about it...ask questions, check out the website above...Go, go, go!*

*I look forward to hearing from and working with you...this is the start of something big!*

*Best Regards, Stephen Steinhaus, Assistant Principal*

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## **CHILDHOODS DISPLACED BY FAMILY IMMIGRATION: THE CASE OF DOMINICAN IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES**

**Sharon Utakis and Nelson Reynoso, Bronx Community College, CUNY, USA**

The Dominican community in New York City is transnational, with migrants who move back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Dominicans migrate for economic reasons and to rejoin family members who have gone before them. Because of immigration policies and the process of migration, family members may be separated for extended periods of time. We examine the traumas that both provoke and result from these migrations.

More than half a million Dominican migrants live in New York City alone. Dominican migration has resulted from political and economic instability following the rule of the dictator Trujillo, who ruled from 1930 until his assassination in 1961.

We focus on two families. In one, a mother left the Dominican Republic when faced with a desperate financial situation, and was separated from her children for several years. We interviewed both the mother and daughter. The daughter discusses the effects that this separation has had on her life and on how she raises her own children. The second family also faced separation due to immigration, but in addition to financial reasons, the family was motivated by the health condition of one of the children. The boy, whom we interviewed as an adult, was born with congenital cataracts and over time his vision deteriorated. Because of his situation, and the family's economic situation, the family eventually migrated to the United States. We will see traumas that these families faced and will also see the various strategies that the families and children used to cope with this separation, both successfully and unsuccessfully.

We supplement these three interviews with information from other interviews collected as part of the Dominican Oral History Project at Bronx Community College. We have interviewed more than twenty-five Dominican immigrants in the New York City area in English and Spanish.

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## **“WE DIDN’T MISS OUR MOTHERS”: THE EFFECTS OF LOSS AND SEPARATION ON DISPLACED CHILDREN OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR**

**Riki Van Boeschoten, University of Thessaly, Greece**

In the final stages of the Greek Civil War about 20.000 children were separated from their families and sent to Eastern Europe by the Greek Communist Party. Although the removal was presented as temporary, most grew into adulthood in their new host countries and many never returned. An equivalent number of children were removed by the Greek National Army and settled in children’s homes within Greece. These two evacuation schemes gave rise to a major political controversy both in Greece and on the international scene. The extreme politicization of the issue, however, has obscured other aspects of the refugee children’s experience, such as the trauma of loss and separation, their agency and the changing notions of childhood which have marked their lives. In this paper I will draw on the interview material I have gathered with anthropologist Loring Danforth to focus on some of these forgotten aspects. Our research revealed, amongst others, that many children, although deeply traumatized by loss and separation, showed a remarkable degree of resilience. However, the trauma did not disappear and often re-emerged in different forms later in their lives. Against this background, I will analyze the long-term effects of trauma on the refugee children’s lives by focusing on two life stories. They present the experiences of two women who were divided by politics and by ethnicity, but united by their life experiences: both lost their father through violent death during the Civil War conflict, both felt estranged from their mothers after being reunited and both emancipated themselves from the strict gender roles ruling relations in the villages of their birth.

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## **“OH, NOTHING GOOD” – EVACUATIONS IN THE FRANCO-GERMAN BORDER REGIONS, 1939-1945**

**Nicholas Williams, Saarland University, Paris-Sorbonne University**

When asked what she remembered about her evacuation from Lorraine in 1939, the shortest answer an eye-witness gave was: “Oh, nothing good”. Hers is one of the many voices from the

evacuation of the Franco-German border regions, which saw 500,000 civilians from either side of the border transported towards the interior of both countries respectively. Ten months of exile were to follow, which given the later atrocities of WWII hardly found their place in both countries' collective memories but which remained more than active in the memories of those affected – and in their communities' memories, too. Recently however, the events in the Franco-German border regions have received more scholarly attention.

This presentation focuses on the eye-witness accounts collected over the decades by several local historians, the novel aspect being that the French and the German cases are no longer seen in isolation but as interrelated phenomena, comparable in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

The sources investigated for this paper look at previous interview material collected by the above mentioned local historians, as well as the more recent material I have recorded. Those interviewed were, for obvious reasons, children at the time they were evacuated, under similar circumstances despite the very different systems they lived in: democratic France on the one hand, a totalitarian "Volksgemeinschaft" on the other. The interviews suggest their experiences were nonetheless similar, and the question whether they remember a warm welcome or hostile rejection will have depended on political factors but also very much on their hosts' open-mindedness, as well as the ways in which the evacuation was later commemorated. In a last step, the evacuees' experiences as children are briefly compared to the British case, where large-scale evacuations during WWII have gained a much more prominent role than in continental Europe.

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## **DISCUSSANTS**

### **Dr Pallab Majumder**

Lecturer and Clinical Research Fellow, College of Medicine, University of Leicester, &  
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

### **Experience of unaccompanied refugee minors of their contact with specialist mental health service.**

This project has been continuing for approximately last one and a half years. It will try to fill the gap in the knowledge on the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking young persons of their contact with the specialist mental health services. This qualitative study will explore the beliefs, perceptions and experiences of these unaccompanied refugee minors of their contact with specialist mental health service.

The attempt is to answer a number of research questions as depicted below, with an objective of generating a knowledge base, a platform, for future more focused research in the almost untouched area of experience of these vulnerable young persons with mental health services. To be able to suggest the changes that are required to be made in the contact of mental health services with these young persons is also an objective of our study.

1. What are the unaccompanied refugee minors' experiences with specialist mental health services?
2. Are these experiences perceived to influence the overall effectiveness of the service provided?
3. What are the factors perceived to influence these experiences?
4. Is there anything that this population believe needs to be changed in the services to make their experience and contact with the services more effective?

The sample consists of refugee children and young people who are unaccompanied. Data will be collected by interviewing approximately 30 young people and also their carers from the consecutive referrals to a Tier 3 Children and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) team for looked after children. Young people and their carers will be interviewed using a semi

structured interview schedule. All the interviews will be audio taped, transcribed verbatim and analysed using models of thematic analysis.

Children are a unique research group who are particularly vulnerable. This applies even more in unaccompanied children seeking asylum, many of whom will have been persecuted by authorities in the past, making a careful ethical consideration ever more important for this group.

This project now has a full ethical approval by the NHS Research Ethics Committee. The piloting of the interviews has also been completed. Currently this project is at the stage of collecting research data by interviewing of the study participants. Given the opportunity, we shall be happy to present the progress of the project so far and the ethical and methodological issues that were faced and our thoughts on dealing with such dilemmas.

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### **Dr Kate Brown**

I am a UKCP registered attachment based psychoanalytic psychotherapist working in private practice, I also work in the NHS with families of patients of psychiatric services. Many of the families I work with have fled war, and impacted by trauma. I trained at the Bowlby Centre, where I now teach the psychosis module of the training program. I come from a therapeutic community background, working as a therapist for Community Housing and Therapy and as a residential childcare worker at the Cotswold community. I recently returned to do a clinical placement with former servicemen at Community Housing and Therapy's Homebase project. I am also in the process of completing my MSc in therapeutic approaches in mental health, and have a research interest in trauma and families.

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