

**Seven Letters: Impacts and Representation of the Holocaust**

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## **Abstract**

While living in Amsterdam in the 1940's, my family was separated by Nazis shortly after my grandmother's birth. I am named after my great grandfather, who hid some of my family from the Nazis and sent others to various countries in order to save as many lives as possible. Eight of my relatives were killed in the gas chambers, but the remaining members of the family survived. After the war, my great grandfather alongside the rest of the remaining family members experienced lifelong survival guilt and waves of PTSD. The only reason we know the details of all these events is from a series of letters written by my family members during their time in hiding. My documentary will be based on a series of letters written by my family members during their time in hiding, retelling their stories through direct readings of the letters, additional anecdotes, and animated recreations of the events described.

The film will be a hybrid of live action interviews with my grandmother and animated sequences showing the events she recounts. The interviews will include readings of my family's letters, elaborations of the events' details, historical context, and recollections of the emotional effects and trauma that everyone suffered. Actors will recreate the events described on a green screen. This footage will then be composited with animated environments, and transformed using visual effects and overlays to create the final image. An original score will also be composed for the film in order to provide an aural bridge between segments, making the transitions between the interview and animation more seamless.

History is better understood and learned from when connected to personal experiences. The psychological impact on survivors is something rarely discussed in

Holocaust documentaries, but is critical to understanding the trauma survivors face. The survivor guilt my family experienced caused enormous pain, and led to the withholding of information that could have been passed down for generations. Perhaps if their pain was better understood, they would have shared their experiences. If more people talked about this trauma, it could start healing beyond my own family. Too often only statistics are used in writing about the Holocaust and this detachment from emotional involvement makes it more difficult for people to empathize with victims. Without personal impact or emotional understanding, these horrific events could be repeated. If people do not empathize, they will not be motivated to prevent similar events in the future. I also want to use my paper to explore how technical decisions of this film as tools to reflect memory and history. I will reference films such as *Flee*, *Persepolis*, and *Waltz with Bashir*. I have also met with a producer of *Flee* in person, and will share some of the concepts we discussed revolving around the use of rotoscope animation in a nonfiction format.

The purpose of this film is not only to preserve my family history, but also to showcase the humanity of victims of atrocities like the Holocaust. Many documentaries adopt an informative tone, solely focusing on the importance, reasons, or ongoing impacts of these events. These are important ideas, but the primary goal of my film will be to emphasize the personhood of the victims. I believe that highlighting the unique personalities of my family will cause the audience to see the people who endure these horrors as individuals rather than mere statistics. I want the audience to empathize with Holocaust survivors' ongoing trauma after seeing this film.

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## **Introduction**

The Third Reich was approaching its height in 1942. Nazis exterminated Jews and others at a record rate. Forty Thousand concentration camps were constructed, and 6,000 Jews were gassed daily at Auschwitz alone. Devastation spread like wildfire and families were torn apart. One such family was the Krant family. My family. They struggled to survive as my great grandfather attempted to hide as many family members as he could, and though he managed to hide four, eight of them were taken. After their deportation, these six relatives wrote letters to each other from the cattle cars and camps, desperately trying to cling to a glimmer of hope. The thoughts and emotions they experienced as they endured the Holocaust are detailed in these letters, providing a chilling glimpse into the last days before they met their fate. Of the dozens of letters written between relatives, seven of them were recovered and translated. This film will retell the stories of these seven letters through animated reenactments and an interview with my grandmother, who survived the Holocaust. History is better learned from when connected to personal experiences. Because of this, Seven Letters will rely on these letters to showcase the humanity and individualism of the victims, while also providing historical context. I hope to promote a more tolerant way of thinking, discourage the hate and dehumanization required for events like the Holocaust to take place, and preserve my own family history.

## **Historical Background**

The Nazi occupation of the Netherlands began in May 1940. Holland had been vying to remain neutral in the conflict but fell under German control after a brief and

futile resistance. After five days of fighting, the Nazis bombed Rotterdam, killing almost 1,000 civilians. This prompted Holland to surrender to the Germans, leading to a five year German occupation. During these five years, the Dutch faced constant oppression and starvation while three quarters of the Jewish population was deported to concentration camps. The persecution of Dutch Jews began immediately after the German invasion. Jewish people were banned from all public places and fired from any government positions, and were forced to work in Axis factories and projects, while systematically being evicted and transported to concentration camps. Every man between ages 18 and 45 was forced out of their home and deported to Germany to work in incredibly dangerous factories. Anyone who resisted German efforts was executed. By 1942, all Jews were forced to wear a yellow star of David to identify themselves to Nazi officials, and deportations to death camps were dramatically increasing. More transit centers were built to increase the efficiency of these deportations, and the death toll rose exponentially.

Initially, the Jews who were herded into cattle cars did not understand what was happening. They had no idea that they were being led to their death until they saw the smoke and smelled the stench of dead bodies. Many didn't survive the transit to the death camps, so by the time they arrived, the cattle cars became a horrific mix of people crammed against the piled corpses of their loved ones and fellow countrymen. Living conditions in the camps were nothing short of a hellscape. The barrack's cells were overcrowded, often holding almost double the recommended occupancy of the barracks' initial design. Prisoners received very little food and water, causing widespread starvation. They had no beds, furniture, electricity, running water, or

bathrooms. The only form of heating during the winter was a feeble iron stove, and the only bathrooms were a single lavatory at the bottom floor, creating extremely limited access. This led to a complete lack of sanitation, leading to rampant disease, lice, and rat infestations, further increasing the number of deaths within the camps. Throughout the day, prisoners were forced to work on whatever laborious tasks were demanded by their captors. They worked an average of 11 hours each day, sometimes within the camp and sometimes miles outside of the camp. At the end of the day, they were herded back to the camp while being forced to carry the bodies of any workmates who had died during the day's labor. The Nazis administered additional punishments at will for any minute infraction, such as acquiring extra food, diminished quality of work, relieving oneself at an unapproved time, wearing non-regulation clothing, or attempted suicide. Punishments included flogging, confinement, and torture. After suffering through these nightmarish conditions for years, most prisoners met their fate in the death chambers, either by means of poison gas or showers. In the end, 138,000 Jews from Holland were imprisoned in death camps, and less than 40,000 survived.

### **Post-War Trauma**

Even after the Holocaust, the trauma was far from over for its victims. A qualitative study conducted by Farber, Smith, and Eagle shows how multiple Holocaust survivors experienced lasting trauma in similar ways. The study adopted a case study model, interviewing nine Holocaust survivors on a weekly or biweekly basis. In the end, 74 hours of interview material was recorded and analyzed independently by three different authors to determine coinciding themes and core findings, with an emphasis on

long term emotional impact. The study concluded that “despite the passing of many decades the impact of Holocaust related trauma exposure was evident in the narratives of child survivors both in the form of traumatic stress symptoms and features of traumatic bereavement” (Farber, Smith, Eagle, 99). Survivors of the Holocaust experience lifelong suffering caused by the loss of loved ones, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and a phenomenon called survivor guilt. The survivor’s emergence from this horror while watching millions of others die leaves them with lifelong emotional scars, grief, and guilt. They ask, “why not me?” and wonder if they should have met the same fate as the other victims. The effects of this mental disorder are debilitating in nearly every aspect of victims’ day to day lives. They feel an immense emotional weight, and analyze their actions during the event and wonder why they survived when others didn’t. This can lead to mood swings, depression, hopelessness, isolation, suicidal thoughts/ideations, flashbacks, physical symptoms, and lack of sleep. Survival guilt is classified as a type of post traumatic stress disorder.

The effects of survivor guilt are compounded differently in younger survivors. Not only did these victims endure the terror of the holocaust, they also often experienced the sudden loss of parents and caretakers. The nature of this bereavement creates complex situations where victims struggle to accept the loss of a loved one. Those who died during the Holocaust never received proper burial or acknowledgement in death, causing their surviving relatives to struggle in finding a sense of closure and acceptance. In many cases, survivors experience a prolonged sense of denial accompanied by an ongoing relationship with the deceased person. The violent nature of this bereavement inhibits victims’ ability to find any sense of emotional stability,



clinging to the memory of the deceased as if they were still alive. This complicated form of grief is characterized by “intense yearning for the deceased, feeling a lack of meaning after the loss, an inability to trust others, and impairment in daily functioning” (Horowitz et al., 1993, Farber, Smith, and Eagle, 100).

The aforementioned study also concluded that while all the survivors who were studied experienced forms of catastrophic grief (grief caused by catastrophe that leaves a sense of ongoing loneliness and despair in old age), Holocaust survivors managed to live alongside this grief more successfully than many other victims. They led relatively well-functioning lives despite the constant, looming trauma and despair. However, the impossibility of resolution prevented all Holocaust victims from completely overcoming their condition. The study concluded that Holocaust survivors experience a “trauma trilogy,” consisting of lifelong grief, anger, and survival guilt. Survivors and their families are often met with feelings of rage focused at their oppressors. They are furious that their life was plagued with this senseless atrocity, and are left with a bitterness in their outlook and reflection. They constantly grieve their losses, adding to their hopelessness. The survival guilt many victims feel compound these emotions, further amplifying their despair.

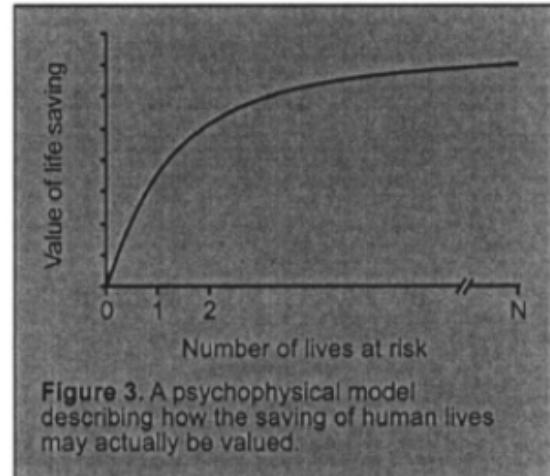
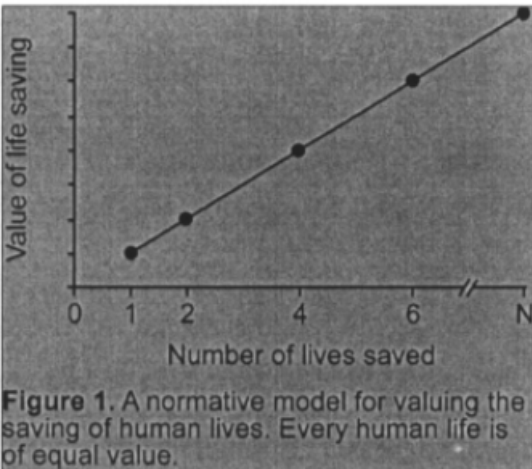
These three ongoing effects combine to cause constant waves of existential dread in victims throughout the remainder of their lives. The trauma leads survivors to believe that nothing matters, and struggle to find a purpose to continue living for. This effect is best documented in Victor Frankl’s book, “Man’s Search for Meaning.” Frankl was a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps who dealt with existential dread after his narrow survival. The book outlines his desperate search for a sense of purpose, a

feeling shared by an overwhelming number of other surviving Jews. He describes his recovery as psychotherapeutic, stemming from introspection. He found meaning through purposeful work, love, and courage in the face of difficulty. He considered the power of survival to be transcendental, spurred by “intensification of inner life.” Frankl elaborates on Nazi tactics to strip victims of all humanity and will, and how some prisoners fought this mentally until the bitter end. As all facets of humanity and freedom are robbed from victims, Frankl asserts that “the last of all freedoms is independent thought.” The reliance on his own independent thought as a source of his humanity not only helped him endure the horrors of concentration camps, but also find meaning in his post-war existential struggles.

### **Representation of Tragedies**

“Statistics don’t bleed” (Koestler, qtd. In Frank, Slovic, Vastfjall, Vastfjall, 1)

Tragedies have been often represented as mere statistics, and while this succeeds in delivering the overall scope of the event, it fails to garner any sense of true empathy with those affected. Because of this, statistical representation alone fails as a call to action. The diminishing affectual value given to lost lives as the scope of the tragedy increases is represented by a graph called the value function.



“When applied to human lives, the value function implies that the subjective value of saving a specific number of lives is greater for a smaller tragedy than a larger one.’ Moreover, research also documents that ‘feelings are lacking when large losses of life are represented simply as numbers or statistics’” (Slovic, 83-85). Victims become numbers, and people lose any hope of true empathy with them. This is why Koestler writes, “a dog run over by a car upsets our emotional balance and digestion; three million Jews killed in Poland cause but a moderate uneasiness...we are unable to embrace the total process of our awareness; we can only focus on little lumps of reality” (Koestler, qtd. In Frank, Slovic, Vastfjall, Vastfjall, 1). Numbers reflect events in a purely logistic fashion, failing to cause genuine affectual reaction or understanding. This deeper connection to the event is better achieved through the presence of imagery and story. The sheer enormity of genocide creates a problem of representation. How can you measure suffering on such a massive scale? How is such widespread trauma best understood? Without statistics, the scope of such tragedies would be lost, but statistics do not tell the whole story.

The nature of this pedagogy is best understood when connected to theories of rhetorical psychology, or the psychology of argumentation and persuasion. This branch of psychology seeks to understand how information is best presented, understood, and interpreted. A psychological concept essential to the understanding of rhetorical psychology is “dual process thinking,” which states that cognition and understanding occurs through two distinct forms of rationalization: a logical, analytical form and an intuitive, experiential form. The basis of the intuitive form of thinking lies in affect, and it has been repeatedly suggested that affect occupies a primary role in the motivation of behavior. In fact, one of the most important functions of the analytical system is to assess the validity of primary affectual impressions formed by the intuitive system. Psychologists like Daniel Kahneman suggest that the intuitive system is most efficient at reasoning with unfamiliar information and acting on it, so the second system plays a key role in monitoring the judgments created by the first system. Affectual reasoning and moral intuition are the driving force of judgment due to the first system’s efficiency and general reliability, and these initial judgments are then either supported or denied by the logistical system of thinking. If left unchecked, the first system of thinking can cause impulsive and irrational decision making. Reliance solely on the intuitive system when forming judgments may also cause people to favor some stories over others, or see individual stories as wholly representative of a larger population. This is certainly problematic for reasoning and rhetoric, but the effects of an unchecked second system can be much more dire, leading to a potential lapse in affectual understanding and empathy. One such result of the denial of the first system is psychic numbing.

Psychic numbing is the tendency for people to ignore or develop an indifference to the suffering of large groups of people. As the number of deaths increases, people's capacity to empathize decreases. One person's death is a tragedy, but millions of deaths is a statistic. As the writers of [arithmeticofcompassion.com](http://arithmeticofcompassion.com) describe, people "often become numbly indifferent to the plight of "the one" if that person is just "one of many" as part of a bigger problem. We know that one life is very important, but the difference between 87 and 88 lives at risk feels insignificant" (Slovic, 1). When information is presented solely through statistics, the phenomenon of psychic numbing is allowed to take full effect. This is illustrated by the outrage people felt by the murder of Aylan Kurda, a Syrian toddler, contrasting to the desensitization people experience toward the Syrian crisis as a whole. "Generalizations expressed in numbers have little persuasive power," Frank writes. Numbers fail to appeal to the affectual basis of human judgment, so its effects on the audience's interpretation are greatly diminished. This is why the most effective persuasive arguments are formed by appealing to a combination of statistical context and intuitive connection. "Without affect, information lacks meaning, and won't be used in judgment or decision making" (Frank, Slovic, Vastfjall, Vastfjall, 611). The lack of connection to personal experience can lead to a lack of empathy within audiences. People will fail to fully grasp the full effects of a tragedy, fail to understand why atrocities are so significant, and thus fail to incorporate what they've learned in their own decision making. Psychologist C. Daniel Baston says "considerable research suggests that we are more likely to help someone in need when we 'feel for' that person. A lack of affectual understanding may lead people to ignore the effects of

historical events, making it far more likely for them to be repeated. If this is allowed to happen, the horrors of genocide will be allowed to reoccur.

### **Current Relevance of the Holocaust**

Though the events of the Holocaust occurred roughly eighty years ago, its effects still are and always will be relevant to modern society. PBS and the Anti Defamation League report that “A new report by the Anti-Defamation League reveals antisemitic incidents increased 36 percent in 2022, reaching the highest level recorded in history since 1979...Assaults went up by 26 percent. Incidents of harassment increased 29 percent. Acts of vandalism rose by 52 percent...Antisemitism is a clear and present danger right here, right now in America. Not only was '22 the highest year that we have ever seen — and we have done this for almost 45 years — this was the third time in the past four years that we broke a new record, that, literally, the number of incidents has climbed almost 500 percent over the past decade.” (J. Greenblatt). When further discussing the potential causes of their findings, the Anti Defamation League cited multiple possibilities. They report that extremists feel emboldened due to the rhetoric and actions of former president Trump, spurring more open attacks to Jewish individuals and communities. They also reference the increase in attention given to conspiracy theories and the use of anti-Israel political sentiment as a justification for antisemitism. “antisemitism has been normalized and almost weaponized in the political conversation and in sort of public debates. It's now just common course to use antisemitic tropes about Great Replacement Theory, about who controls Congress, or who controls Wall Street, who is responsible for COVID, and on and on” (J. Greenblatt).

The Holocaust is not significant solely because of its impact on Jewish culture, or solely because of the everlasting trauma it created. The Holocaust is significant as a signal for what can happen when widespread hate is allowed to be the driving force of mass action. “The Holocaust is a deeply personal story about the effect that hatred and prejudice can have on a community. It is a story about millions of people who refused to use their voice to help others, and because of that refusal, millions of people lost their lives for no other reason than the belief that they were an inferior people” (Holocaust Museum Houston). People believed that because they weren’t Jewish, it wasn’t their fight. They said that their action or inaction was irrelevant because they were not directly affected by the events. It is precisely this bystander mentality that allows a culture of oppression to take power. Elie Weisel, author of “Night,” summarizes this when he says “We must take sides. Neutrality always helps the oppressor, never the victim.”

Similar themes of hatred are on the rise in our current society. Racism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and countless other hateful ways of thinking are allowed to spread and infect ways of thinking around the world, and the tropes of their continued potency are remarkably similar to the tropes that allowed for the reign of the Third Reich. The oppression required to promote bigotry is maintained by systematic dehumanization. Dehumanization is the process of depriving people of positive human qualities. Examples include the proposed “Don’t Say Gay bill,” the slandering of immigrants in political rhetoric from Trump, DeSantis, and other prominent figures, prohibition of traditional hairstyles in primary schools, consistent reports of racial bias in the workplace, and neonazism/modern antisemitism. Dehumanization always starts

small. Legislations are passed under the guise of social stability while actually robbing people of their individuality, promoting sentiments of inferiority. For example, opponents to critical race theory have coaxed some lawmakers to ban the teaching of “divisive concepts,” such as racism and sexism. “FutureEd has identified 47 bills introduced or prefiled this year in 23 state legislatures that limit teaching on these topics. Alabama, Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah have enacted 11 of these bills, signed into law by their Republican governors” (LePage, 2021). This ignorance of issues pertaining to specific demographics leads to a lack of acknowledgement and empathy for their unique perspectives, further pushing these groups to the margins of society. It is the widespread belief of a group of people and their issues as unimportant that allows for their abuse and alienation. In the Holocaust, this began with the Nuremberg laws, eventually leading to over 400 new pieces of legislation aimed at excluding Jews from society. Similar attempts at this have been reflected more recently in the Chinese exclusion act, the Muslim Travel ban, and the restriction of gay marriage.

Just as the same dehumanization of the Holocaust is present today, so is the same ignorance and inaction that allowed for its rise. People who are not directly affected by examples of discrimination feel no urgency in its combatance. A study conducted by *Psychology Today* found that “on average, more individualistic cultures scored lower on empathy. Individualism involves seeing oneself as distinct and separate from others, which could impair our willingness or ability to feel compassion for others and to imagine what it is like to be them” (Konrath). White people often see little reason to fight against police brutality, and straight people may see no motivation or urgency to



fight for gay rights. Cisgender people often idly watch the alienation and discrediting of transgender people. “Everyone needs to be involved, because antisemitism isn't just a Jewish problem, just like racism isn't just a problem of Black people, or homophobia talking about LGBTQ people. Antisemitism is everyone's problem. It's a universal concern” (J. Greenblatt). Oppression and dehumanization anywhere is a threat to equality and peace everywhere. If people don't learn how the Holocaust was allowed to take place, it could easily be repeated with any marginalized demographic. By empathizing with other groups, people can prevent the gradual dehumanization necessary to bring about tragedies such as the Holocaust and promote a more tolerant way of life.

### **Representation of Memory through Animation**

When it comes to appealing to people's empathy, few mediums rival the capacity of film. The multifaceted nature of filmmaking allows for the art to connect with viewers more efficiently than many other mediums, as it allows for the combination of visuals, music, sound design, performance, and text to deliver a message. My film uses a combination of interviews, animation, historical photos, ambient sound design, and an original score to create a grounded tone, emphasizing the content of the piece.

The idea of using animation in the documentary form may be rare, but can be an immensely engaging way of representing memory in a nonfiction setting. Films such as Flee, Persepolis, and Waltz with Bashir prove that this somewhat risky technique can deliver a captivating, stylized result reflecting the film's content. In critique of Flee, Benjamin Lee of *The Guardian* writes that “In animating the interviews with

Amin and the various events being recalled, Rasmussen finds an unusually immersive way to pull us in even closer, one that's both emotionally involving and artfully realized" (Lee). Persepolis and Waltz with Bashir both utilize a similar method of combining animation and voiceover to tell a real person's life story. One reason the use of animation was so successful for these three films is because they center around the recreation of memory. The representation of memory with a nonfictional tone can give rise to concerns regarding the accuracy of the information. Memory is fallible, fragile, and subject to being altered by external influence. This means that one's memories are not entirely reliable as a nonfiction source. "By employing animation to represent traumatic war memories, *Waltz with Bashir* constructs a system of documentary rhetorics that rely on spectatorial trust in the authenticity of creatively depicted experiences, rather than faith in indexical, observational evidence" (Shibolet, 271). If these films had recreated the real-world subject's memories in live action and attempted to mimic primary source footage from the historical events and time period, it could have inadvertently implied that the events being portrayed are completely accurate. The person's memories very well could be completely accurate, but with no way of verifying this to a plausible degree, it could cause ethical concerns.

The form of animation avoids this concern while mirroring the idea of memory on screen. Referring to a documentary called Nuts! the filmmaker writes that the use of animation was "a kind of a nod or a wink to the audience that things are not totally straight forward...The idea that the imagination is being used is very foregrounded when you have animation" (Lane). The practice of animation is based on the construction of an image, just as these films are reconstructing a memory. On the

contrary, a camera captures an image, regardless of whether the image's contents are staged or not. The distinction between constructing an image and capturing an image has drastic subconscious effects on the way audiences receive an image. Because a camera captures an image, an audience is more likely to interpret a film's content as one hundred percent accurate when presented in a nonfiction form. However, audiences understand that the very practice of animation inherently includes construction and recreation, so their interpretation of the film's validity will align much more closely with the true accuracy of the source.

### **Production of Seven Letters**

My film uses a combination of interviews, animation, historical photos, ambient sound design, and an original score to create a grounded tone, emphasizing the content of the piece. The production of my film began with a two hour interview with my grandmother. This was an incredibly emotional and moving experience, as I learned about the history of my family and the everlasting effects the trauma has caused her. She detailed the story behind my family's letters, and the struggle to preserve them. My grandmother's mother initially attempted to hide or destroy all of the letters written, because the memory of the Holocaust was too overwhelming. This meant that most of the letters were lost, but my grandmother found seven of them and managed to preserve and translate them. She provided countless fascinating anecdotes about how our family survived the Holocaust and struggled to endure the PTSD and survivor guilt that followed those involved throughout the remainder of their lives. As we spoke, I began to understand how difficult it was for her to partake in this project in the first

place, and how much she must care about the project's goals to subject herself to the pain she felt while reliving these stories. In order to promote a more comfortable environment for her, I was the only crew on set during the interview, and it was produced with a single camera and minimal lighting. The fact that I was the only other person present seemed to allow her to reveal much more than she would have otherwise, because of the trust she holds in me. She repeatedly told me how grateful she was to be doing this, but it was impossible for her to hide the discomfort and emotional weight that this reignited for her. Despite this, she persisted, and has continued to aid in the film's production, providing more insight, evidence, and photos of her family. I hope that in some way this film can help her heal, as it may provide her with some form of closure that her PTSD and survivor guilt deprived her of. This interview is supplemented with animated scenes corresponding to each of the seven letters.

My film is conscious of the ethical concerns of representing memory on screen not only in its use of animation, but in the organic way it appears on screen. The animated reenactments in my film were created by recording the screen on which the animation was drawn. The final image is formed by compositing layers of moving characters on top of the timelapse of the background's creation. The fact that the viewer is watching the initial sketching of the image as it unfolds on screen is reflective of the way we attempt to conceptualize the details of the described events. All the information we have to recreate these events to the best of our ability is bits and pieces of information: the letters themselves, the year they were written, and broad historical context. Details such as the exact location of the subject, who they were surrounded with, and how they behaved when writing the letter were extrapolated. Because of this, I

wanted to show the fragility of this reconstruction within both the interview itself and the animation style.

The interviews in my film center around my grandmother retelling the story of her family's struggle for survival. She explains the difficulty in recovering and translating the letters, and reads them in English. The readings of the letters will become voiceovers accompanying the segments of animation. In her interviews, she also provides context to what life was like during the Holocaust, providing crucial background to the more specific events being described. The editing of the interviews will include very few cuts and no alternate angles, minimizing anything that may distract from their content. The way she delivers her stories and information will resonate deeply with viewers, so my stylistic choices including composition, editing, and color grading, will be made with subtlety in mind in order to allow the interview to take its full effect. This segment of the film will provide a majority of its emotional content and serve as the driving force of the film's overall purpose.

Seven Letters will also utilize historical photos, text, and ambient sound design to further engage the viewer. Photos have been provided by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and will be presented alongside title cards to provide further historical context. They display a wide array of scenes, showing victims boarding trains to concentration camps, living in barracks, enduring forced labor, and being herded in death camps. These haunting images show enormous crowds of Jews, causing the audience to imagine the individuals discussed in the interviews as part of these groups. The title cards will contain historical facts about the larger scope of events taking place at the time. They describe how the Holocaust operated and how its scale grew over time. The

text and historical photos will be supplemented by ambient sound design of concentration camps and cattle cars, enhancing the suture of these segments. Because the interviews and animation mostly revolve around the specific, human stories of my family, this larger context will allow the viewer to better understand the scope of the Holocaust as a whole.

The various sections of Seven Letters will also be seamlessly combined using a subtle musical score, accenting the emotional quality of its content. An original theme was written and performed for the film, and through several sessions with the composer, was tailored to match the goals of the project. It is comprised of a simple melody from a grand piano, harp, and flute. Rather than polishing the timing of each note in post, each element of the piece was performed and recorded live on a MIDI keyboard. This creates a more organic and authentic feel to the score, reflecting the aim of the animation. Additional reverb was added after the score's recording in order to echo the themes of loneliness and isolation that the film creates.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the stylistic choices, structure, and content of my film serve the purpose of fostering empathy in viewers. I aim to connect with both the analytical and affectual sides of the brain, in order to balance accurate context and emotional impact. The segments of text, photos, and historical context will accomplish the connection to the logistical brain, while the interview anecdotes, animation, sound design, and score will connect to the affectual side. While statistical context is necessary for the audience to develop a complete understanding of my message, the film will prioritize the emotional

side to deliver most of its purpose. This is because the affectual side is more likely to cause a call to action to resonate with viewers. My target audiences for this film are film festival attendees, young viewers, and my family. I will reach these audiences by submitting the final film to several film festivals across the world, as well as applying to screen the film at various museums dedicated to tolerance and the history of the Holocaust.

It is easy to think that such a tragedy could never happen again, but unless the general public is mindful of the root causes of atrocities like the Holocaust, we cannot expect to see significant change. As Sienie states in the film, "No one in Europe thought this would happen at the time." People must be aware of systematic dehumanization and extremism, and must have the courage to stand up to corrupt systems of power. People must also promote a culture of empathy so that the true scope of tragedies may be understood. I hope this film will create a meaningful connection with viewers, allowing them to empathize with victims of tragedy and encouraging a world in which events like the Holocaust will not reoccur.

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