-TITLE- YAEL DANIELI

-I\_DATE- APRIL 9, 1991

-SOURCE- ONE GENERATION AFTER, BOSTON

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND\_QUALITY- POOR

-IMAGE\_QUALITY- FAIR

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES- ENGLISH

-KEY\_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-

-PERSONAL\_NAME-

-CORPORATE\_NAME-

-KEY\_WORDS-

-NOTES-

-CONTENTS-

Dr. Yael Danieli Director and Co-founder Group Project for

Holocaust Survivors and Their Children est.1975 Lecture to Boston's

One Generation After group in 1985

1:8:32 In the early 70's my interest shifted, being a PhD

candidate, from mental illness to mental health. Part of what I

said to myself was that before we talk about mental health, we have

to learn what it means to be alive and we have to want to survive.

1:9:11 I asked what makes people want to stay around to begin with

and what occurred to me at the time was that it was hope. I brought

that idea for a doctorate to my advisor and he got quite excited

about it too. I set out to study what I sought to understand as the

psychology of hope.

1:9:58 At the time I was teaching at Brooklyn College and all of my

students got nuts with me. We tried to encompass everything, that

is, any challenge to hope- starting from missing the subway or

failing a course to losing your job, getting divorced or becoming

physically handicapped.

1:11:00 I sought the extremes and the extremes at the time, being

the late 60's and early 70's, were unusually troubled. I also

got into serious work with the terminally ill and their families.

At the time, everybody, every poor student of mine got into the act

and it made them quite happy, even though we were researching very

sad things, hopeless things.

1:11:53 We were asking the whole range of questions from total

hopelessness, or what seemed to be, to total hopefulness, what does

it mean. Well, that led me to a range of interesting and exciting

findings and yet one of them kept working at me- every survivor I

spoke to felt quite isolated and strange and had negative reactions

to other people. What kept striking me over and over was that every

survivor ended up saying that nobody had ever talked to me or

nobody has ever believed me when I tried to talk about the war.

1:13:17 I kept hearing tales that nobody wanted to listen and

nobody could possibly understand, even the mental health

professionals who they had sought in therapy. Here I was, a growing

mental health professional, hearing all of this about my fellow

colleagues. It didn't look like they had lived up to their job,

which was to listen and to understand and I was getting

progressively indignant.

1:14:05 I interviewed survivors at their homes. They told the same

tales- nobody wanted to hear about this, if they mentioned it to

their friends, they were thought of as freaks. People said the same

things: "this is America now...put away the past...you're being

morbid."

1:14:46 At the time it seemed like the only real way to go was to

get people together in groups, because if survivors feel that no

one understands them and that no one will listen, the logical step

would be to bring survivors together. They wouldn't feel mistrust

and isolation in a group. I also figured that it would help mental

health professionals because if they are not listening or if they

could not understand, there would be survivors there who would. It

seemed like a good idea.

1:16:17 I had a personal struggle at the time deciding whether to

work with cancer patients or survivors. However, being a very proud

Jew, I decided to work with my people at the center for this type

of study, in Brooklyn. I asked for a list of every mental health

professional who had ever called the center, with the logic that

anyone who had ever called would naturally have some interest.

1:16:58 I called each one and asked them if they would be

interested in volunteering. The idea behind volunteering was that

no one had ever been trained in this field, no school or program of

study had prepared people to work with survivors of the Nazi

Holocaust and their children. I figured that since the survivors

were going to provide the training, it would be like bartering. It

seemed fair and all things seemed right.

1:17:50 We started in about '71 or '72. We got the groups and it

was quite an incredible experience because the kind of togetherness

that we experienced was unheard of at the time. It was really

wonderful and people kept talking about having a family again. That

is essentially what we were building, an extended family and a

sense of family.

1:19:45 Survivors say that now they can finally talk and understand

each other. We started with survivors and the notion of course led

to the name, Group Project. I know how sensitive survivors are to

being called sick or insane, so there was no way we were going to

attach ourselves to an institution.

1:21:13 You all know what sensitivity is when we talk about it.

There are many feelings here that lead to sensitivity. One is the

history of euthanasia in Germany. It of course didn't start with

the final solution of the Jewish problem. It began at the very

beginning of Nazi Germany, even before the War began, with the

gassing of imperfect Germans, the mentally retarded etc.

1:21:50 Later on, after '42 when the final solution came about, if

someone was sick, thus incapable of work, he was gassed or killed.

Being sick therefore was certain death. Many survivors feel that it

is a posthumous victory for Hitler that if they feel that they

aren't healthy and can't raise children who are physically healthy-

they cannot survive. Every child thus became a symbol of happiness

and hope and of the future. All of that got into the idea of

bringing new life into the earth.

1:24:26 We saw these survivors not as sick but as people who had

adapted miraculously to situations never encountered; isolation,

hunger, distress, betrayal. We figured that after the War, the term

"getting back to normal" didn't apply. There was no longer anything

normal-no home, no family, no community. Instead of trying to get

people back to normal, we tried to find out what they meant by

normal. We learned a lot.

2:00:20 I study different families. One type is a family of

fighters. When I say fighters I don't mean fighting ensured

survival. What I mean to say is these people chose to feel like

fighters after the War probably to counteract the feeling of the

victimized Jew. Families of fighters knew that they had to be

strong and couldn't be weak.

2:3:18 The children of these families also felt the need to be

fighters. They told me stories of how they would go to marches and

demonstrations and yell at the cops. In their relationships they

couldn't be soft and tender.

2:3:18 The most tragic kind of family is the numb family who are

survivors who usually lost both their parents and their children.

In these families, the parents still behave as if they were in

total shock, no feelings are allowed at all-no bad feelings and no

excitement either. The children in these families are tragic, they

are left to fantasy and imagination-they are left alone and

neglected. They are afraid to succeed and have never been given

guidance or been taught. Because their parents don't understand

success, it is hard for their children to understand it.

2:6:40 Another kind of family is "those who've made it". These are

usually the ones who've made it American style. Even though I talk

about families whose marriages are mostly bickering or marriages of

disparity, rarely do survivors divorce, they don't destroy families

like that. Those who've made it are usually younger, they were too

young after the War to immediately marry. Their motivation was to

beat the Nazis, however they could-study, be famous, be rich, etc.

These are the people, who, when they came to America, took out the

numbers. They were not going to let anybody know that they went

through the Holocaust. If they married survivors, they tended to

divorce and marry non-survivors, thus denying by saying, "I don't

belong to these people". They assimilated into American society.

2:8:50 Something gets lost here. Because what becomes important is

what is displayed. What matters is to succeed, relationships get

lost. Children of these families only get noticed when they

succeed. These children usually find out about their heritage not

in the home, but from a stranger and this creates pain.

2:12:15 I want to make a drawing. The very middle is "I" with the

next circle as family. Concentric circles continue with the next

ones being community, religion, nation, international... Ideally,

people have a life which is free flowing and they move from the

past to the present to the future through these realms. When

victimization occurs, there is a rupture in the circles. The more

areas it hits and the earlier it hits, one's ability to succeed is

reduced. It is harder then to move into the future remaining fixed

in the present. When fixity occurs, therapy, getting people

together, creating a family and a community is a necessity. As long

as you are stuck, options are not there. Therefore, hope is not

there. As much as you feel better,you cannot get better. To get

better takes a lot of work, to escape the fixture and not be stuck.

2:19:09 The meaning of getting better is to explore, to see beyond.

Getting better says that I can really become aware of who I am and

what disrupted me. Then it is possible to again gain a sense of

continuity and start the free flow. I was born and I grew, no

matter what the Nazis did to me or how I had to act to adapt.

2:26:25 When survivors are finally able to mourn and let go of

their guilt, they are transformed. They can fall in love, succeed

in relationships, stand up and say "I am alive and I like myself'.

That takes a lot of time and very hard work.

2:28:14 I want to talk about survivors' guilt. Guilt is a very

powerful obstacle to living. Originally survivors' guilt was a

feeling of why was I spared? Carmeli(ph) tried to transform this

and she believed that if all these survivors had survived, there

must be a reason for it. She separated what she said was passive

guilt-"I was spared the fate of others"-and active guilt which

occurs legitimately when we compromise our sense of values or when

we don't do something that we should do. This was a helpful

distinction.

2:31:59 Guilt is the most powerful defense against the sense of

existential helplessness. Guilt creates a lie, it wasn't that I was

helpless, I could've done something, I just didn't. This implies

that you had the options and the power to exercise a choice and you

choose not to.

2:32:38 This is an invention to defend the hopelessness of the

situation, actually there was nothing you could do. Every child of

a survivor, out of great love, wants to undo the Holocaust, both

for their parents and for themselves. They want to have a community

of love and trust and to have opportunities that were taken away.

There is so much love in survivors families, but a big part of it

is a love that says "I wish I could". Children of survivors like to

try to play God and take the bad away. This creates acute guilt and

a feeling of helplessness, there is nothing they can do to save the

Jews from the Holocaust. This helplessness is very painful.

2:36:28 One function of guilt is plain loyalty. The feeling of

wishing people were there. A survivor believes that he is alone and

therefore wishes old family members alive. This keeps the dead with

them and is a kind of loyalty. Part of this loyalty says then, that

to be loyal is to be sad and to suffer. It is a living

commemoration of the dead, but since these people didn't have

graves, their relatives often walk around as tombs.

2:40:02 You may ask yourself would it have been better to have

died, this is not to deny the pain. An ironic function of guilt is

that the murderers do not feel it. The victims are feeling the

guilt. But this guilt is a sign of morality in a world that is

seemingly immoral. This is warped but it is right.

2:42:45 Survivors age prematurely and die prematurely, usually from

cancer. There is a chronic sadness with survivors, but also a sense

of hope and a joy and an appreciation for life. The Nazis deprived

the Jews of the natural process of growing, aging and dying. Normal

aging does not exist for a survivor. He encounters the same

situations, but feels them deeper. Retirement is very difficult

because of the notion that salvation and life only come through

life. When people retire, they have more time to think and they

review their life. In the case of survivors, as they age and

review, they are attacked by memories. Their bodies are not as

strong and they get sick.

2:47:03 Being sick is a problem for survivors. Their families feel

unable to put them into old age homes. Know that there is a special

need for these aging survivors. Bring them in, take care of them.

You will get a sense of doing something really good for people who

need it. Thank you.

.END.