Terry Kurgan - Family Secrets Photography as Storytelling

- Well, good evening everyone, and welcome. We have a very special treat for you tonight. We have a presentation by Terry Kurgan. She's a South African artist, she's a writer. She's based in Jo'burg, and she's going to be talking about her recent publication, "Everyone is Present," which won her the 2019 Alan Paton Prize, which is South Africa's premier literary nonfiction award. "Everyone is Present" was also selected as finalist for the 2019 National Jewish Book Award in New York and shortlisted for the Photo Arles Book Prize in France. Now, it's a part memoir, it's a part detective story and part investigative reporting. And I'm going to leave it here, suffice to say she is a brilliant creative artist and it's beginning with a family snapshot made by her Polish grandfather in 1939. Terry, welcome so much to the Lockdown University. Thank you very much and over to you.

Visuals are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Thank you Trudy, and thank you Wendy Fisher and Judy for inviting me. I'm really delighted to be here. Just that you know how this hour will unfold. My plan is to start by talking a little bit about how I came to write "Everyone is Present," and then I'm going to show you a four minute film trailer that two filmmakers experimented with making in relation to the book around the time that we were launching in early 2019. And it'll give you a sense in just four minutes of what the book is about. Then I'll read you an excerpt, show you the images that the excerpt circulates around, and then finally we'll move to the Q and A, and I'll be really happy to try and answer some of your questions. So this is the book, this is the physical object. My book, "Everyone is Present," grows directly out of almost 30 years of a multimedia professional visual arts practise, which has been very much about intimacy, familial relations, and the tension between private life and public culture in the South African context. But most importantly, my work is always about photography, and it's important to emphasise that word about.

I'm really not a photographer. I'm often called a photographer and referred to as a photographer, but in fact I'm quite technophobic and with regard to cameras, I've only ever been capable of point and shoot and relied heavily on PhotoShop. But even when I have taken photographs and exhibited them in museums and galleries, or when a project involves public interaction and has the making of photographs at its heart, I do a lot of public art projects. For example, a five-year long project that I called Hotel Yeoville, which was all about, it was a project that I made at the time of terrible xenophobia in Johannesburg, and it was a project about immigrants and refugees that had photography at the heart and image making at the heart of the project in terms of what it means to make photographs of people, whose human rights are being infringed. There isn't time to tell you about other projects, but I thought I'd show you the cover of that book. But, so the photographs that I work about are always also about themselves as physical objects and about what photographs mean in the world. This might sound very abstract, but as we go along, I think you'll begin to understand what I mean how photographs act in the world and then of greatest interest to me of all is how they're able to hide time and secrets. To give you a brief sense of other work, I work in a very serial way.

One project develops into the next, into the next, and this book, as I said, grew out of, you know, 30 years of practise and things that I've been thinking about forever. I'm going to share my screen and show you a few slides of other work without saying too much about that work because I don't want to take up too much time with it. So, okay. So I'm going to just quickly troll through what I mean by I work about photography. This was a work that I made 20 years ago, and it was about family photographs and what they mean. You can see people are walking through my installation. This was an installation called "Lost and Found," and I've, it was archival personal family images printed onto silk. This was an installation of Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, the site of the brand new Constitution Court in much more optimistic times in South Africa. This was a project I made in 2002 when the court launched, and I worked with images in relation to clauses from the constitution. Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing. You see people, you see through them to the most crowded suburb full of immigrants, Hillbrow. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement. Here you see police stopping people for any number of reasons. This was another exhibition about photography in the women's jail. This was about the ghosts of the women's jail through different historical periods in South Africa. This was a project in Jube Park, where I mapped the location of 40 photographers, who had absolutely fixed positions in the park.

Each one of those numbers represents a person, usually a man, and they came from all over the continent, and I collected their unclaimed photographs. These are two of the photographers. This is an example of the sorts of photographs that were commissioned from them, many of which were commissioned and unclaimed. And this was a project to demonstrate in a way, who lived in Johannesburg 50 years ago, and who was coming to Johannesburg from all over the country and from the continent in 2005, which is when I made this project. Okay, bear with me while I move between things. So as for writing, I've always written alongside my visual artwork and projects, but that kind of writing, essays and chapters in books and academic journals was usually in harness two and in a supporting role in relation to my work as a fine artist. I'd never attempted a work of creative nonfiction or a work where writing was the primary medium before. Where did the book come from? Where did the idea for this book come from? Well, to begin with, it's always been there, but never quite in this form.

I've used some of the images that I write about in the book as the source of drawings, and sometimes I've included them in installations as part of museum and gallery shows. I have my mother Leonia Kurgan to thank for stimulating my curiosity. In my grandfather's diaries and I need to show you an image of those. So my grandfather, Jasek Kallir, kept diaries, daily diaries. Can you see that image? I hope so. This is an example of just a small number of the diaries that he wrote and kept. They were the most extraordinary objects. We only have them from the 1st of September, 1939, the first day of the war. I presume he'd written them always but fled. And so along with everything else, all the other contents of their home left the diaries of the years preceding the war behind. But he handmade, as you can see from that image, he handmade each section of the diary, each section that you see there held together with a paperclip represents one month in a year. The diaries contained notes about, you know, intimate personal

internal life things. They contained recipes he wrote about the books that he was reading. The section of the diary that I based my book upon is his record of three years that the family spent between Bielsko, Poland, fleeing always just a day ahead of not being able to get out of where they were and finally arriving in Cape Town, South Africa.

Let me show you another slide. There you go. That's a close-up view of his extraordinary handwriting. He always used a fountain pen. Okay, so I have to thank my mother for seeing, to hold onto preserve and safeguard her father's diaries after he died in 1973, and for stimulating my curiosity in them in the first place. Some seven or eight years ago on a visit to my mom, who at that time had lived in Los Angeles for over 30 years, for a whole bunch of reasons, she handed me guardianship of the diaries, papers and photographs, and I was able to bring them back with me to South Africa, where I began to think about a project. First my grandmother and then my mother had attempted a translation of just the first two years of the diaries. My grandmother entirely in her own favour, and she had edited out anything that was unflattering to herself, which of course we only discovered when my mother took the same two years to a professional translator. I was intensely curious about the contents of these diaries.

They were largely in Polish, a little bit of German and completely locked to me, who didn't read or write or speak those languages. And my mom had 1939 and 1940 translated and had stored them in the drawers of my grandfather's own writing desk, which was one of the objects she'd shipped to Los Angeles from Cape Town in 1981 after my grandfather died. On each of my visits, I'd pore over them, organising them into chronological months and then years. And in the later diaries, I would find the odd sentence and sometimes hold pages in English. So the next thing I did was I raised a grant to have them translated. I applied and I was very lucky to be awarded a writing fellowship at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research. I was a writing fellow and artist in residence, which gave me the time and the space and the focus to really get on with this project. And I found the most extraordinary translator, who was very important to the development and the unlocking of my mother's childhood and these pages and pages of my grandfather's words. I was giving a talk at the University of Johannesburg one day and I showed slides, the very slides, that I've just showed you of those diaries and a young man came to talk to me and he was Polish, and his father was exactly the same age as my mom at the time, 80, and had retired and was from more or less the same part of the world in Poland. In fact, he wasn't Jewish, but you know, the Germans hated the Jews.

The Russians absolutely hated the Poles. And as a four year old, my mom fled, and you'll come to understand what happened to my mother and her family. But he and his entire small town of a hundred and, well not such a small town, the entire population of the place that he lived, which was right near Lwów in the east of Poland, were exiled to Russia. But my grandfather also took photographs and I have a handful of them, upon which I base this book that I wrote. I'm going to show you what some of these photographs looked like and you know, this treasure trove of materials suggested so many paths and so many different projects. I had to keep reminding myself that I was engaging with my family's stories by reflecting upon what it means to look at photographs. That is, you know, always, I suppose you could say my most significant interest.

There were a handful of photographs that were mostly shot between 1935 and 1945. Photographs shot in their former home in Bielsko, photographs of their holidays in Zakopane in the Tatras Mountains of South Poland. That's my grandmother on the right, the little girl in the middle is my mother's sister, my grandmother in the white bathing costume, my grandfather's sister on the left. So, this was my raw material. This is what I had to work with, the diaries and these images, my imagination, a lot of historical research and just a moment. I think my aim with "Everyone Is Present" was to try a different medium as an approach to a project and certain preoccupations that have been with me for as long as I can remember.

The book was my attempt to unravel a complicated family history that was full of secrets and myths in order to make conscious for myself what I've come to understand as intergenerational transmission. There's an off repeated quotation from the work of the psychoanalyst Nicholas Abraham, and he said, "What haunts are not the dead but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others." And that really resonated for me in the context of my grandmother, my grandfather, and the family story. I understood this to mean what I've inherited in my DNA at a cellular level, what has been delivered into my unconscious by the experience of the generations that came just before me and just before them, what was bred in the bone. I haven't personally suffered the loss that my grandparents and my mother did, but they lived with buried and repressed memories of unspeakable acts and loss, which I believe were delivered into my unconscious at birth and have been there, as I've said for as long as I can remember. I think this book was my effort to bring so many things up to the surface. And in terms of my interest in and study of photography and the transgenerational reverberation of images, there's a very important writer and scholar based at the moment at Columbia University.

Many of you may know her work, Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term postmemory, specifically for photographic images in relation to the Holocaust. She coined the term to capture memory as it manifests itself in the transgenerational reverberation of an event. So in material terms, postmemory is embodied as the after image that certain photographs provoke. Photographs that seem to hover between an individual's memory and impersonal history. It's quite possible that one might not have lived through such events oneself, but an image of them pervades the culture one inhabits. The best example of this, it's an image, you know, it's sort of the Holocaust poster, the image of that little boy with his hands up in the air in the coat that was several times too large for him as he and others were captured by the Gestapo and forced start of hiding in the Warsaw Ghetto. We all know that image. For Hirsch, collective experiences may be distilled in torn or faded photographic images of someone or something lost or unknown, exposure to such images intertwines with the stories of those who did live through the events penetrating by various cultural means into the very fabric of the self.

Marianne Hirsch writes about how children of Holocaust survivors, exiles and refugees, have a unique way of viewing family photographs from this period while attempting to build a stronger sense of identification with their parents past through these images, they also look for the hidden violence and threat that may reside just outside the frame in the vain hope that they may be able, just may be able to protect them. As Hirsch notes, these photographs enable us in the

present, not only to see and touch that past, but also to try and reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic tech. And so this book, which I feel as a work in my body of work as an artist and a writer, is darker and more complex as well as wider in scope than anything that came before it proposals. I think what I've always believed that the past is deeply implicated in the present and that the more carefully we look at the world, the more we find evidence of the vanished past. That the present is made from the remains of the past, but also reciprocate that the past is shaped by the present when we try to find it. So I'm going to share my screen again and show you this short film that was made by filmmaker friends. The book was published by a tiny niche publisher in South Africa, "Fourthwall Books" who work at the intersection between literature and art. And we were thinking about ways of marketing the book and we didn't ever use this as marketing, but they made this lovely film trailer, which will give you a sense. This photograph in my family's album records a day in the summer of July or August, 1939, and at the very outset of what was to become one of the greatest atrocities of the 20th century. My grandmother was fucking Doctor Lax. He's the man in the photograph and that child is my then four years old little mother. What was my grandfather looking at as he took this photograph? Was he recording his own suffering?

This is where my maternal grandparents, Yashik and Tusha Kallir, their two young daughters, Sophie and Leonia, with their governess and their extended family and friends customarily spent their long summer holidays. I wondered about my grandfather's seemingly neurotic, obsessive drive to maintain this record of his daily existence and whether he was filling up these pages against his low self-esteem and his sense, which is so powerfully communicated that he was living the wrong life. These two weeks on the ship are a limbo like window of time that enables some relief. They're suspended in a liminal space between continents and lives and the order of their days on the ship reproduces itself with comforting regularity. I visited the front deck, which is inhabited by Indians, Parsis, and Arabs who sleep under the stars on woven mats and thick Persian carpets. In the evening, we danced on the deck in the dim reflection of one blue electric light bulb, the small chamber orchestra and the dancing close together in the dark on the ship. It was something quite uncanny and it gave me an uneasy, anxious feeling. In the afternoon I meditate, mostly about Tusha and her flirtation with a young English officer, who seems to fallen in love with her. The pages are mostly filled with detailed accounts of the way he filled each day, but at times include secret wishes and desires and list failures and disappointments, which might have been too painful for him to admit more publicly.

I scan the little photograph at a high resolution and zoom in on the detail I'm straining to see. They're both holding cigarettes. Perhaps the man is trying to attract my grandfather's attention or marking his presence in front of the lens or perhaps he's waving or taunting or warning. He might have noticed his neighbour, Mrs. Carra, handing an SS officer a bunch of the late blooming roses that he had been so proud of. How long did the neighbour continue to water the violets on the balcony and the rubber plants in the living room before she considered ransacking the cupboards and upturning the drawers? I try to imagine the dismantling, carpets with carpets, chairs with chairs, glass with glass, mattresses with mattresses and silverware with silverware. Strangers rifling through my grandfather's desk, his documents and diaries, their bedrooms, the

linen closet. I wonder what happened to the cat, the children's toys, and who went on to wear their shoes, my grandmother's silk stockings, her party dresses and her furs. Clothes take on a person's body shape and smell. They've been washed and ironed and worn through use. They're filled with the memory of her life. I'm going to move straight from that to reading you an excerpt from the book. It's about the fourth chapter, the fourth essay in the book, and it's called Street View. And just to contextualise the passage that I'm going to read, it's just as my family begin to flee, they were living in Bielsko which is right near Kraków. Just as they begin to, the Germans have just invaded.

They move with so many other Jews east, they're moving toward the gulf. My grandmother and the children have left ahead of my grandfather, so he's alone in the apartment and that's the passage that I'm going to begin to read. The radio warns people to move into shelters in the event of further attacks from the air. My grandfather retrieves his camera from the top drawer of his writing desk, noticing that the three drawers underneath it are partly open and that the chronologically ordered pile of notebooks he filled this year has been overturned. He stacks and reorders the notebooks and then moves across to the open bay window and pushes the intricately woven damask curtains aside. The pavements and the broad streets below are deserted. It's turning to autumn and there's just the hint of a chill in the air. The two well tendered beds of shrubs and flowers outside the Bank Of Polski, dark green reds and violets, some salmon pink and cornflower blue are all in their last blue. The doors to the bank have been shuttered and locked. He observes how well polished the double set of brass BP insignia on the middle doors appear in the slide. They've forgotten to take in the doormat. In April, 1938, the Polish state's largest financial institution adopted a provision to exclude Jews.

It has been over a year since he last dusted off his shoes and crossed that white marble threshold. Two men walk into his field of vision, they're engrossed in conversation and seems strangely relaxed under the circumstances. They stop to light their cigarettes and one of them begins to raise his arms. And it is at this moment that my grandfather lifts the camera, chooses his aperture, finds his focus, and composes the shot. The siren sounds again. The men pick up their pace, turn left at the corner and they disappear. I packed a small suitcase with two changes of clothing, our certificates and documents, some photographs, my stamp collections, recipes and experiments. The camera and then on second thoughts, my revolver. I left a note for Truda with our address and telephone number in Lwów asking her to clear the table and telling her that on her way out she should leave her keys in an envelope I had prepared with our neighbour, Mrs. Carra. I noticed that my hand was shaking. I watered the plants, I closed the windows, I drew the curtains, I wound up the clock, and I stood for a while before I locked the door. The photograph in the album is just 5 by 8 centimetres and the inscription on the page in white in that spidery hand reads . It is late afternoon.

We see the clean, wide and empty pavements, the flower beds in the park just beyond them. The domestic garden behind a wrought iron fence and the solid functional heavy sandstone masonry monumentally grounding the bottom of each building. A narrow path of bright sunlight running between them interrupts the very deep shadows that they cast. Both were built between

the 1880s in the end of the interwar period. The golden years of a wildly eclectic pan-European architecture and also of the prosperity and development of this beautiful town. My grandfather was photographing the street, but what rivets my attention are the two men dwarfed by the massive architecture that dominates the frame, and by the distance from which he took the shot. The indistinct expressions on their blurred out faces. And then most particularly the ambiguous gesture of the man on the right. I scan the little photograph at a high resolution and zoom in on the detail I'm straining to see. They're both holding cigarettes. The man on the left is just bringing his up towards his mouth for another good draw. While the man on the right is holding his in his left hand with his arms raised in surrender, both men appear to be looking directly up and at my grandfather.

But I wonder whether at this moment of capture, he's also looking at them. He was famously extremely shortsighted and everything at a distance would've appeared to him in a blur. Perhaps the man is trying to attract his attention for marking his presence in front of the lens, or perhaps he's waving or taunting or warning. As I enlarge the photograph to the point just before it dissolves into a two-dimensional grid of pixels, my inability to uncover the meaning of that gesture is perhaps part of the meaning of that time. It's very clear that the man with his arms up in the air is looking directly up at the man in an open bare window. And I want to be able to see what he sees. My grandmother's Polish identity book issued in 1936 records her home address as Number 10, Ulica Teodora Sixta, Bielsko. I type this into Google Street view and within a matter of seconds I'm in colour in bright summer weather. And as I'm soon to discover, dead in front of their original front door. Google must have been here at more or less the same time of day. And judging by the trees, which are in leaf in a similar season, the afternoon sun still envelopes that bank building and while the road is paved with different materials, the gas street lamp is gone and the bank's name and external light fittings have changed.

The late summer flower beds, my grandfather was admiring just outside the right hand edge of this frame are still there and the doors up those stairs to the building are still shuttered. I move the image in a circular motion towards the left and bring it closer toward me. A strange distorted sense of depth comes from the panoramic, stitched together view. I notice pots of deep red geranium peeping of the lyrically ornamental top right hand balustrade peering up at the apartments. I long to know which one it was. I try to zoom in more closely and find a position parallel to the front door. I want to see the doorbells and name plugs and perhaps the exact brass door handle they would so frequently have touched. But no matter how carefully I deploy the technology, this is as close as I can get. That pole is always in the way of a more direct line of sight. Janina Mulsson, artistic dress maker, creator of wedding gowns and business suits, reads the sign. I zoom into the window on the left, but the faint promise of a glimpse of Janina at her sewing machine or methodically pinning up the hem line of a wedding dress behind those pink and yellow fabric flowers disintegrates into vivid colour field squares.

And once again, my view is frustrated. I scour the facade of the building for clues. This is a closeup, cropped view of one of four curved bay windows, set into the building in which my family once lived. It has slipped through the dispassionate impersonality of Google's net. On this

warm summers day, the window is wide open and a sun drenched white muslin curtain has billowed outside of it and is moving with the breeze. The image speaks about the interior and beckons me inside. I can easily imagine somebody just beyond this curtain. Perhaps they're eating breakfast in a sunbeam at a table in the room. Now feeling as predatory and voyeuristic as Google's camera, I can see in all directions and beyond my grandfather's view, I can take myself for a walk up the road towards the park following the long cold trail of a little brown dog. Or I can turn left past the grey haired man in the middle of his brisk looking stride and see what I find as I circle a block. I turn left at the corner and cross the road. Upon closer inspection, the bank building looks unoccupied. The flower beds are messy and neglected, filled with weeds, overgrown shrubs, and some scraggy red rose bushes needing a prune. There's an old man with his back to me. Further up the road, I overtake two women walking in opposite directions, mirror images of each other as they cross right feet forward, heads down, handbags firmly tucked under one arm and a bulging heavy shopping bag suspended from the other.

A woman bends down to unlock a roller shutter. A man on his cell phone crosses the road. Two little boys loiter at the curb. The buildings look and feel as if they've been here forever. They're largely stoned, solid residential, a mix of classical renaissance symmetry proportion and geometry embellished with Art Nouveau ornamentation. Baroque extravagance and gothic points. There are more balconies with pottered and flowering plants, daisies and lobelia. My grandfather loved lobelia, blue lobelia, more red geraniums and at a ground level, some graffiti in the occasional retail store, a tattoo parlour, a camera shop, an optician, a dance studio, a green grocer, a corner boutique. I turned left again at the next corner and imagined my grandfather walking here with the street, remember him, the tread of his foot, or the unique way that his almost always brown leather shoes creaked. While my grandfather's 1939 street view is ghostly in its black and white evocation of a history long past of the erasure that took place in the time just beyond when his camera was angled there, it is the automated random, disinterested lens of Google's digital eye that entrenches my sense of the removal of all traces in history of the individual living subjects that once existed here The street, these buildings still present and almost exactly the same in the 2013 images offer up nothing at all. These images with no memory taken by nobody are uninterested in the people who fall within their range and render them, in turn uninterested in their surroundings.

So most of the photographs that I worked with in "Everyone is Present" are analogue. You know, that's before digital and printed of negatives which are associated for many people with a trace or a shadow or an essence of the person or the object ones depicted there. But I think all the way through, I was more interested in the trace of the photographer, my grandfather, what it might be, what it might have been that he wanted, what desires and what projection were in place in the making of these images. As my grandfather bestowed his photographic attention upon his family and those closest to him, what emotional and psychological drives guided him, what might he have been looking for in return? And as I probed and examined, you know, these 10 or 15 photographs and examined them for evidence and a greater understanding of him and their past lives, I suppose that this is where as granddaughter, spectator, and reader my own projections, needs and desires entered the picture. When I began writing this book, I had to

write a longer proposal and then a shorter abstract.

And I wrote at the time, I would like to produce the literary work that develops in relation to the evocative power of photographs as objects. I want to work over and with a small collection of my own family's archival photographs that possess what Roland Barthes terms, an evidential force tracing a trajectory from personal to collective acts of memory. My aim was to write a series of linked narrative non-fiction essays that told my family's story in an exploration of these paradoxical objects and their propensity to tell lies and truth at the same time. I'm interested in provoking questions about the subjects of the photographs, photography itself and the role of the photographer within its process. The project focus is on intimacy and familial relations and the unfixed nature of narrative photography, memory, and family histories. Now that's quite a mouthful when I read it and when I look at it now, but all the way through the writing of my series of essays, I was curious about many things, but nothing more so than this complex negotiation that always takes place in the making of a photographic image. And by that I mean, you know, I'm looking at you, you're looking at me. We both want something from each other. And I was trying to understand what the mutual need of both photographer and subject perhaps for affirmation and recognition might have meant, you know, in this context.

And finally posted on the wall in front of my writing desk while I was working then, and still now, as I get onto my next book project is a quotation from an article, the Art of Process by experimental American filmmaker Alan Berliner, who also works about his family, who also tries to connect to big topics in history and universal themes through intimate stories about very ordinary people. He makes documentaries using new and found film and photography that mine his own and his family's lives. Excavating, as I've said, seemingly ordinary everyday stories to address more poetic and universal themes. And the quote goes like this, I realised that a film about my father and he made a wonderful film about his father, could also be a film about love and family and memory and identity and ageing about the unspoken contracts that bind parents and children and siblings and cousins and about world history and family history, the traumatic 20th century and genealogy. And I started to see that this one subject, a biography of this one ordinary man can be at the crossroads, where all these things intersect. And my hope is that with my book, this is what I've achieved. It's very strange not being able to see who's there. And Trudy?

- Yes, I'm there. That was absolutely superb Terry. I can see quite a few questions if you don't mind taking them.

- Okay, I'll just open them. I'm sorry.

- people.

Q&A and Comments:

- Okay, I realise I interrupted the film by opening up the Q and A. Was that disturbing? Anyway,

here they are okay. Okay, so there's a question, there's a request. There've been quite a few requests. Gosh, sorry. Whoops. Have I shared the screen by accident?

- No I can see you perfectly.

- Okay, just a moment. I am looking for somebody, quite a few people have asked me to share the quote again, and I'm just trying to find it. Okay, here it is.

Q: Quite a few people have asked me to share the quote that I mentioned right at the beginning of the talk by the psychoanalyst Nicholas Abraham.

A: Here he is, I've said it, I should note by heart, so it's from his book with his partner Maria Torok "Notes on the Phantom." And it always resonated for me, and I noticed that Philippe Sands in his East West Street, it's one of the epigraphs at the front of his book, "What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others." It's an interesting article, so if you google Nicholas Abraham Notes on the Phantom, you'll find it amongst other things that Abraham writes in that piece. What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. You'll need to read my book to understand what I mean by those secrets.

Another question as somebody mentions fabulous trivia. Okay, thank you. Okay, thank you. Amazing and intriguing, but leaves me with so many questions.

Q: Who were the men holding their arms up? What happened to your grandfather, your grandmother? Did you go to these places of your grandfather's photos?

A: So let me answer the last question first. Did you go to these places of your grandfather's photos? I went, I tried to go, you know, this book is about, I think my desperate attempt to try and retrieve something of my family's past, you know, and I try and go there via my grandfather's diaries. I try and go there via his photographs. I try and get there via Google Street View. I use Google Images quite a lot in this book. And then I go back there with my mother, who hadn't been back to this front door that she had left as a four year old, 75 years prior. And there's an essay in the book about there's more than one essay about that return journey. In fact, the book begins and ends in the same place. So it begins with an essay called Family Affairs that circulates around an image of my grandmother, her lover, and my little mother taken in Zakopane, where the women used to go for the, they would sort of take the governess, the children and set up in the mountains for the summer in the Polish Alps.

And the husbands would commute on weekends. And I went back to most of the places in my grandfather's photographs, and it was vital to the development of the plot of my book and also most extraordinary experience to go back with my mother, who's still alive and has written a memoir of her own. It was extraordinary to go back to the city that she had left as a four-year-old, but which somehow still meant so much to her and to retrace some of walks that she remembered. And yeah, what happened to my grandfather, my grandmother? The book

tells the story of their journey across Europe via, the most extraordinary thing is they take the journey and the complete reverse that refugees have been taking, have been attempting toward the fortress of Europe in our time. They go to Aleppo, they go to Iraq, they go to Syria, they make their way to India, which is where they spend a long time desperately trying to find a country that will take them.

And we all know this history, and they were actually on their way to Brazil, South Africa was entirely accidental and too long a story to tell now, but they landed up in Cape Town, South Africa during a time where Jews were not being allowed into South Africa. There were a family unit of 10, which is also extraordinary that they did this journey, all 10 of them. They were a family unit of 10 out of 500 Jews that the South Africans allowed into South Africa between 1937 and 1948. So my grandfather and grandmother spent the rest of their lives in South Africa. My mother was brought up here, but my grandfather for many reasons was always living the wrong life you know. His diaries are very interesting in that regard. And part of who were the men holding their arms up? I have no idea. I think my grandfather saw them walking by on the street and I used that image to try and imagine what happened on the first day of the war as the Germans invaded Bielsko. There's much more about that in the book.

Q: What year did your family leave for South Africa and where were they during the war?

A: I think I've just answered. So they left, they fled on the 1st of September, 1939. They walked across and into Romania about two weeks later, just before it wasn't possible to do that, especially not for Jews. And during the war, they spent a year in Romania, everywhere they were, they were desperately trying to find a country that would take them in. So they were in Romania, they were in Istanbul, they were in Syria, they were in Iraq, they were in Mumbai, in India. They were in Mombasa and finally in Cape Town, which is when their visas and their luck and their stamina ran out, but they were aimed at Brazil.

Q: Please give us the reference to the book by Marianne Hirsch.

A: She has written so many books and so many books on visual culture after the Holocaust and on photography after the Holocaust. There's one called "Family Frames." There's one called "Ghosts of Home," where she and her partner and her late parents go back to Czernowitz. It's the most extraordinary book. So she spells her name Marianne, M A R I A N N E, and Hirsch, not as you've written, it's H I R S C H. And if you go to Amazon, all her wonderful, wonderful books are there. And they've been very important to my work. And she's become a colleague, which is also wonderful.

Q: Can you repeat the name of the artist you mentioned in your closing?

A: He's an experimental filmmaker, an extraordinary filmmaker called Alan Berliner. Like the city Berlin with ER at the end, Alan Berliner. He has a fantastic website. You can see many of his films. One of his most charming and original projects was to try and find everybody everywhere

in the world with the same name, Alan Berliner. And they meet in, I think New York, and they have dinner together and you're going to have to watch the film to find out what happens next.

A wonderful presentation. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Q: Is your book available in the UK?

A: Yes, my book is available. It's in the email that was sent out by the Kirsh Foundation. My book is available in the US via Amazon. We have distributors in the Netherlands, Idea Books, and they will ship to the UK and Europe. So that's the best place to, the link is in the email. It's Idea Books, and they're in the Netherlands. And you can order my book directly off their website. In South Africa, The best thing to do is to email me and I'll pass you along.

What was, my parents were friends of the Kallirs and I knew Lonka as we all called her. They were special people. I don't know who, I'm curious to know who you are, so please do get in touch with me. I don't know who wrote that question.

Q: What was your grandfather's profession somebody asks.

A: My grandfather was a manufacturing chemist, pharmacist. His family came from Brody. I divert quite a bit of my, one of my early essays to describing the Jewish community of Brody. And you know, Brody was the, the centre of Jewish enlightenment. And it was extraordinary from both a spiritual and an intellectual point of view. And my grandfather came from a family, who had feet in both worlds. They were both in the business world, but also very educated in terms of religion. My grandfather actually went to school in Brody at the same time as the great writer Joseph Roth. He was a few years younger than him, but they went to exactly the same junior and high school. And what's so interesting is my grandfather was completely identified as a Pole, and Roth completely identified as an Austrian and never stopped mourning the end of the Austrian empire. Trudy, you'll know that.

- Yeah.

- He was a manufacturing pharmacist, but he really wanted to go to medical school. And Jews were not, you know, Jews were disallowed. There was a quota and he was interested in analysis, he was interested in medicine, but he was denied those possibilities. And he really lost his profession. It was really tough for them when they came to live in Cape Town, South Africa. He had a laboratory in Woodstock, in Cape Town. And he worked on all sorts of projects, but as I say, my grandfather for reasons more than the Holocaust was, but the Holocaust contributed was always living the wrong life. And that's very powerfully expressed in his book. People have written lovely affirming comments in relation to my presentation.

Q: Somebody, Romaine says, it sounds as if you have had a successful analysis that unleashed your considerable talent. Is that true?

A: No, but that isn't true. But my mother's an analyst, and I've always been enormously interested in analysis in psychology, in the unconscious. I've been, I mean, you know, aside from photography as a subject, the family has always been my subject. That great intense human drama. I'm interested in probably little else, I'm interested in little, I'm interested in the family more than I'm interested in most other things. I love, you know, novels that are great, big family sagas. I dunno if any of you, I've just recently finished reading A. B. Yehoshua's "Mr. Mani," which tells the history of the Jews through generation upon generation. The history of the Jews through 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Correct me if I'm wrong, Trudy, but I think it's three centuries through one family.

I love stories like that, but I'm also just so interested about, I'm interested in the sort of psychic inheritance of each member of a family. You know, how all of that, each individual person is sort of the crossroads through which everybody who came before them and who comes along with them flows. So my book is about, is very much, you know, the Holocaust sort of hangs, it's not a Holocaust memoir, and it's not a survivor, it's not a sort of survivor story, but obviously the holocaust, you know, hangs over my story like a cloud of smoke. But I take care not to, I hardly ever use the word, but I tell the story of a family, whose lives were so impacted by racism, by genocide. I try and connect it to the contemporary refugee story to what is happening in Europe and in the US at this moment. Trudy, is there time for another question or two?

- Yes, you can take one, people are so interested. Take one more please.

Q: Okay. How did they manage financially travelling so long in so many places?

A: It was extremely difficult. They relied upon, they travelled with jewellery. They were upper middle class, secular, university educated. My grandmother was on her way to a PhD. They didn't speak Yiddish. They spoke Polish, German, and French. My grandfather was educated in Berlin. They were snobs. I mean, my mom married a man from, my dad is Lithuanian, and they were very disparaging about her marrying dad down. My Lithuanian family were uneducated, came from and so on. So they managed financially by pawning things, by selling jewellery. There are a couple of things that survive. I have an extraordinary one piece of jewellery that my mother kindly has given me that they use. It bought their lives. This particular piece of jewellery, they pawned it and were able to buy tickets and then just in time relatives in America sent them money. They were so short, it was really, really hard. And also the, what was the organisation in America?

- Joint.

- Yeah, they were helped. They managed somehow, but it was extremely difficult.

Q: Did you and your grandfather discuss any of his writings or photos?

A: Sadly, no. My grandfather died a most extraordinary death. And I was 15 and present at the time. My book opens with his death. No, I was much too young. My interest in all of this developed long, long after he died.

Q: Did you find the writing depressing or was it cathartic?

A: It was neither. It was an extraordinarily interesting project to set out upon. I love the research and because I've always been so interested in photographs and interested in forensically analysing photographs, it was really interesting to take, you know, certain photographs had been like roadblocks in my life. People have told me certain things about them, but these things were at odds with what I uncovered about them as it went along. So it's been a very, there's been a lot of, not so much cathartic as reparation and I'm not sure whether my mother entirely experienced my book in this way, but I think it unlocked her childhood for her, because I tried, I had, you know, 30 years of diaries translated. We've had so many conversations. So, yes, a great deal about my family's life was uncovered for me in the process of making this work.

- Terry, that was absolutely extraordinary. I'm a historian. Your discipline brings it all to life. And I think it's the personal stories that really do connect us with the past. And I'd like to thank you so much for a brilliant, brilliant, brilliant hour. And you've already told people how to get hold of your book, so all of you should, because this is how, I think it's through the stories that we get a real sense of our past and that is so very, very special. So thank you again very, very much Terry and take care and as we say to each other now, keep safe.

- Thank you Trudy, thanks so much for having me. Thank you.

- Been such a pleasure. God bless.

- Thank you. Thank you.

- And goodnight to all of you. And we will see you tomorrow.