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Past is Prologue

A Journey of Discovery

October 10, 2018

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Speaker: Barbara Michelman

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Past is Prologue: A Journey of Discovery – with Barbara Michelman (2018)
The Holocaust Living History Workshop

Time	Transcription
00:00	[The Library UC San Diego]
00:04	[A Holocaust Living History Workshop Event]
00:09	[October 10, 2018 / Past is Prologue: A Journey of Discovery – with Barbara Michelman]
00:13	Susanne Hillman: Good afternoon. I would like to welcome you all to today's Holocaust Living History Workshop. I am Susanne Hillman the Project Manager. It seems singularly appropriate to start this year's series of public events with an appreciation of one of San Diego's most remarkable Holocaust survivors and citizens. I take a genuine and heartfelt pleasure to offer a tribute to Edith Eva Eger before the main event today. From its inception in 2008, ten years ago, the workshop has offered a forum for survivors and their families, students, staff, and community members to learn about the Holocaust. Over the years Edie, as her friends call her, has been an integral part of the program. She has talked about her experience on campus on multiple occasions and we are lucky that we have been able to record at least one of these presentations, which is now part of the Library's Digital Collection. Edie has also recorded her story for the JFCS [Jewish Family & Children's Services] Holocaust Center in Houston, and for the Shoah Foundation, and both video testimonies are now in the Foundation's Visual History Archive, which is available to anyone who visits the UC San Diego Library.
01:27	Susanne Hillman: But Edie is so much more than a Holocaust survivor. In the little time we have today, I would like to take you on a tour through her life in Europe and the US [United States]. We will watch a brief video clip, actually two, and I will read an excerpt from her exceptional award-winning memoir, <i>The Choice</i> . In choosing these materials I have been guided by the desire to show Edie the way she appears to me, a person of almost indefinite courage and compassion, a person who fearlessly confronts life with all its pain and tragedy, but who deliberately refuses to be victimized. Edith Elefánt was born on September 29, 1927, in Kassa or Košice a town in Czechoslovakia which was seeded to Hungary in 1939. Today Košice is part of Slovakia. Here you see the Jewish population of Europe at the time of Edith's birth and here is Czechoslovakia - I didn't bring a laser pointer - and here again, you see Košice as it is today, in Slovakia a close, fairly close, to the border of Hungary. Here are some locations that Edie may have been familiar with during her childhood and youth. These are postcards of Kassa or Košice in the early 1900s. Again, two more street views of the town, and finally this was and is the synagogue in Košice - then and now.
03:14	Susanne Hillman: Edith's parents, uh, and I noticed I mixed their names. Edith's parents were Ilona and Lajos Elefánt. Lajos was a designer; he started out as a tailor and rose to be a designer. This is one of my favorite pictures that I found, the

entire Elefánt family. In her own video testimony, Edie's sister Magda actually recalls that the day this picture was taken, she was somewhat angry because she had just had her hair cut very short. And I think you can see, she's sitting in the middle and she's kind of stiff. All three Elefánt sisters were very talented girls, Clara on the piano, Magda on the violin, and Edie as a dancer. At the very young age, Edie was enrolled in ballet school. When Hungary, Hungary annexed her hometown, Edie was chosen to welcome the Hungarian leader Admiral Horthy with a dance performance - this gives you a sense of her exceptional talent. Her ability notwithstanding, she was subsequently informed that as a Jew she would not be able to participate in the Olympics, a first and painful experience of antisemitism. In the event, much worse was to come.

04:34 Susanne Hillman: In 1944 hundreds of thousands of Jews were deported from Hungary. And note Košice on the map here; it's right up here. The vast majority of these Jews would end up being murdered in Auschwitz. As for the Elefánt family, both parents were among the victims while Edie and Magda managed to survive an almost unimaginable ordeal. Unbeknownst to them, Clara found refuge with a Christian family. As you can read in Edie's memoir, in Auschwitz she was forced to dance for the notorious Mr., uh, Dr. Mengele. Edie and her sister were among those prisoners who were evacuated from the camp as the Soviets moved closer. The two girls were forced, first sent to the Austrian concentration camp Mauthausen, on the left here the notorious, or the the well-known, horrible stair of death. And from there to Gunskirchen, a sub-camp of Mauthausen. Here they were liberated by the US army. At war's end, the three Elefánt sisters were reunited but it quickly became apparent that they could not stay on in communist Czechoslovakia.

05:46 Susanne Hillman: This is one of the many beautiful pictures taken of Edie; in this case, taken one year after the end of the war. This picture belies the physical and emotional hardship that Edie had undergone only recently, but her meticulous appearance and smile also demonstrate her desire, I think, to finally lead a normal life and to relegate her experience to the deep recesses of her psyche. By the way, Edie's recent prominence as an author has enabled me to find all these fabulous pictures online. The publication of her memoir has been covered in the international press, and many articles include photographs; so this was very lucky. And this is shortly after the war also. Edie got married to a Slovakian Holocaust survivor named Béla Eger. These are beautiful and happy pictures and there doesn't seem to be an indication of the difficult journey the young couple had ahead of them in their struggle to build a life together. As she makes clear in her memoir, this was indeed a struggle at times. According to Edie's own account, the move to the US was mainly her decision. She simply did not want to stay in Europe any longer, and Béla finally agreed.

- 07:02 Susanne Hillman: Despite her physical frailty, Edie was determined to have children, and Marianne was her firstborn. And you see her here, on the right, Marianne as a baby and, on the left, as a truly adorable little girl. In a little bit, you will see the adult Marianne in a video clip. And here's Marianne with Béla, or Béla with Marianne in Maryland 1960. In time Edie and Béla would have two more children, Audrey and John. Despite raising a family under conditions that were far from easy, Edie was resolved to go back to school and get an education. Feelings of inadequacy and survivor guilt convinced her that she had to prove herself by excelling at her career. In this picture here you see her at the time she was about to set out on her own journey. Her education would culminate with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, and as a psychologist, she would develop what is called the calamity theory of growth. Her personal experience enabled her to help countless of, countless numbers of patients who had undergone traumatic experiences.
- 08:14 Susanne Hillman: And this brings us to the recent past and present. This slide I think sums up Edie's findings on how calamity can actually be the enabler of growth, rather than crippling growth. Edith's professional expertise and talent soon made her a much sought-after motivational speaker. Over the years she has addressed a wide variety of audiences the world over, from military veterans to school classes, the viewers of Oprah Winfrey and the Prime Minister of New Zealand - a very eclectic sort of group, or multiple groups. According to her own account, she was able to reach so many people because she finally forced herself to confront her own past and losses. Motivated by another prominent Holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl, she began to work through her painful memory. Part of this process involved a trip back to her hometown, and, even more importantly, to Auschwitz. More and more often she also began to share her experiences with memory projects, such as the Oral History Collection of the JFCS [Jewish Family & Children's Services] Holocaust Center in Houston and the El Paso Museum, Holocaust Museum. This is yet another slide, Edith as a motivational speaker. I would now like to show you another clip, this time from Edie's interview in the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive. [The following is from a Shoah Foundation Interview of Edith Eger]
- 09:43 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: this is, this is tape number five of the survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation interview of survivor, Dr. Edith Eger. The date is November 7, 1995. The interview is taking place at La Jolla, California. Edie you have family with you. Would you do us the honor of introducing your family?
- 10:04 Edith Eger: Yes, I'd like you to meet my oldest daughter Marianne, Dr. Marianne Engle, and I'd like you to meet my grandson, and he is Jordan Robert Engle. This is my joy. It's wonderful to be here between them. Having three generations, this is, this is what's all about.

- 10:24 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: Edie, is there anything that you would like to say to Marianne or to Jordan? You know, that comes to your mind in this interview.
- 10:38 Edith Eger: Well, I'm very grateful that I survived to achieve this and to sit here. And telling you, Marianne, that it's, um, it's wonderful that you have been such a beautiful daughter, and, and my grandson who is since the wonderful young man, who invited for me to come and speak to his class - history class. And I have everything that a mother and grandmother could ever dream of.
- 11:12 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: Jordan, how did you feel when when Edie, your grandmother, spoke to your history class?
- 11:18 Jordan Engle: It was it was actually really inspirational for me because I never, I never really hear her doing a speech, or anything like that. And I've just heard her tell me personally. It was really neat to watch her perform, and I gained a lot of respect for watching her do that.
- 11:33 Shoah Foundation Interviewer: Marianne, as a child growing up in the household, did Edie share with you many of the experiences that she went through in the Holocaust?
- 11:44 Marianne Engle: Well, it's ironic - and I think actually now it's shown in the literature to be common - but I heard very little about it. I knew that my mother had had some horrible experience. There was actually a book around the house that probably I wasn't supposed to see like some kids aren't supposed to look at sex books, but this was a book about the concentration camps. And I remember looking at these pictures of these horrible mangled bodies, and people riddled with starvation, and looking at it and wondering what this had to do with my family. And I knew somehow it had to do with something, but I didn't understand it. There were a lot of things when I was a child - like if I heard a European ambulance sound - I would become totally frightened. And I wasn't sure why, but I'd be very frightened. And I don't know if I ever told you this.
- 12:31 Edith Eger: Oh, wow.
- 12:35 Marianne Engle: And they're just lots of subtle things that you experience as a child that you don't know where they come from, but you know that other kids don't seem to have those feelings. And so, as time went on, and I began to understand a little bit - I mean honestly, I think my [end of video clip]
- 12:49 Susanne Hillman: I'm sorry to cut it off so abruptly, but I need to continue here. Here's Edie giving another video interview in 1992. What is so unique about Edie, I think, is her unflinching honesty and bravery in confronting her traumatic past. She does not downplay, much less deny, the immense difficulties she herself has encountered throughout life, or the difficulties others are struggling with. But she has learned and tries to teach others, to shift the focus from victimization to

empowerment. Her approach may be summed up with the words instead of why me, ask yourself what now. And this brings me to this slide, the last slide, Edie's recent fame as a writer. Her book *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*, which has already won two prestigious awards, and has been translated into numerous languages, provides a moving and uplifting look at what is possible for human beings everywhere. To get a sense of how truly remarkable this book and its writer are, I'd like to offer a brief excerpt. And I can add here, that I was absolutely delighted this summer when I was in Switzerland, and I went to a bookstore and lo and behold there was Edie's book, in German. That was wonderful.

14:08 Susanne Hillman: So this is the excerpt:
This is the death march from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen. It is the shortest distance we have been forced to walk but we are so weakened by then that only 100 out of the 2,000 of us will survive. Magda and I cling to each other, determined to stay together, to stay upright. Each hour hundreds of girls fall into the ditches on either side of the road. Too weak or too ill to keep moving, they're killed on the spot. We are like the head of a dandelion gone to seed and blown by the wind, only a few white tufts remaining. Hunger is my only name. Every part of me is in pain; every part of me is numb. I can't walk another step I ache so badly I can't feel myself move. I am just a circuitry of pain, a signal that feeds back on itself. I don't know that I have stumbled until I feel the arms of Magda and the other girls lifting me. They have laced their fingers together to form a human chair. "You shared your bread," one of them says. The words don't mean anything to me. When have I ever tasted bread? But then a memory rises up. Our first night at Auschwitz. Mengele ordering the music and Mengele ordering me to dance. This body danced. This mind dreamt of the opera house. This body ate that bread. I am the one who had the thought that night and who thinks it again now: Mengele killed my mother; Mengele let me live. Now a girl who shared a crust with me nearly a year ago has recognized me. She uses her last strength to interlace her fingers with Magda's and those of the other girls and lifts me up into the air. In a way, Mengele allowed this moment to happen. He didn't kill any of us that night and any night after. He gave us bread.

16:00 Susanne Hillman: This excerpt testifies to Edie's amazing ability to perceive the positive, even in the darkest of circumstances, and her insight into the complexity of human beings. By noting that Mengele's gift of bread had allowed her to survive, she's not praising the doctor, but she is recognizing - as Viktor Frankl did - that even people given to extreme callousness and brutality have moments of humanity. Instead of dwelling on what Mengele and the Nazis took from her, Edie has chosen to remember what made her survive. I won't say more but would rather like to encourage all of you who haven't already read that wonderful book to, um, go buy it and read it. Edie, it has been a privilege and a joy to know you. Thank you for everything you have done, and for being you. Please join me in saluting Edith Eger.

- 17:09 Deborah Hertz: Hard not to get teared up, but it's also a wonderful local story because Edith has many, many descendants, and relatives, and uncles - and not uncles - but nephews and nieces, and I seem to meet a lot of them. Also, it's good to know that there's a therapist waiting for us when, and that moment surely comes. Um, I want to start, um, by just a little bit of a family memory. In the summer of 2014, my brother, my son, and my cousins went to Lithuania and Latvia on a family roots trip. Now, normally I wouldn't mention this because we weren't refugees. We weren't survivor, they weren't survivors. My poor great-grandfather left at 20 as a penniless tailor and peddler and ended up in South St. Paul, Minnesota, and it was all a history of obscurity. Nobody was famous; nobody was important; nobody was distinguished. Um, but I mention this because, when we were on this trip, we went to Vilna. We went all over Lithuania and we visited many kinds of memorials. We went to a lot of little tiny Holocaust memorial museums, Jewish history museums. We went to a lot of cemeteries, broken down cemeteries. We met with people who build up cemeteries, and I thought a lot about, in my many trips to Berlin, about different kinds of memorials.
- 18:33 Deborah Hertz: As you probably know, one of the paradoxes of the Holocaust landscape today in Europe is that Germany, the place that had a tiny Jewish population, uh, has more memorials than Eastern Europe which, in which, the vast majority of people were killed. And if you've watched the recent Eichmann movie, I think you'll agree with me, that persecution of Nazis is actually another form of memorial. I say this as a way of introduction, uh, to this wonderful, um Barbara Michelman, exhibit which we're going to be, which is going to be up in the library, and we're going to be hearing a talk because in her work she shows such a fascinating new dimension of what it means to memorialize. And if you think about the ways that her work transcends boundaries, so we have photography - which is normally about verisimilitude [verisimilitude], about exactness - and then we have art - which is about re-creation. Those are combined. We think about individual family history, and the history of cities, the history of communities, the history of Jews, and we see those combined. Now we historians are very partial to the idea that our books are the best memorials. We couldn't get up in the morning, come to the library, sit at our desk, teach our classes, if we didn't believe that.
- 19:56 Deborah Hertz: We think that examining a question that comes up in Barbara Michelman's exhibit - which is, you know, why was the rate of death in Lithuania so high? Who were the Lithuanian helpers that made the project possible? Who else besides Jews was killed in the Forest of Ponar? Those are the questions we ask, but actually, the questions we ask are not only answered by our own research, and what I think will be a fascinating lecture today, is to find out about how art - specifically the kind of very creative photography that Barbara Michelman does - shows us another way to remember. And the question that I'll end with is a question for her - is that you? I picked you out! I thought you were the person, but I wasn't entirely sure. Which is, her work is called, and the title of today's event is

called, *The Past is Prologue*. Now, that's really interesting because it seems like that - when you're living in America today - the past might be revisited but you don't mean that. You mean a prologue, I think, in a more cheerful sense than many of us fear. So, I welcome, uh, Barbara Michelman. No? Okay, so in any case, welcome to San Diego and I look forward to your talk.

21:27 Barbara Michelman: Well first, thank you for that fabulous introduction. I hope I can live up to it. And then, I would like to thank the UCSD Library, the UCSD Jewish Studies Program, and the Living Holocaust Project. To you Lillian, where are you? Okay, for bringing it to Susanne Hillman who made this all possible. Thank you so much Susanne for all your hard work, and the months of the logistics of putting something like this together, and, and giving this life again. I mean that that is, that means a lot to me. So, thank you. And, um, this is a very personal story, but it's also the story of family, of people, and, in a way, the story of the world that's not just past. But it's also about the moments that we confront on a daily basis, about who we are today, what kind of a human being am I, what kind of people are we, uh, how do we want to behave in the world. And it was always my intention, when I created this project, not to simply have it be a museum piece, but to speak to the present moment.

22:58 Barbara Michelman: So, I, I, I took two trips to Eastern Europe. The first trip was in 1990 when all the communist governments were collapsing. I, I traveled to Poland, to Czechoslovakia, to Romania, to Bulgaria, to Hungary. But I couldn't get into Lithuania at the time because there was a civil war going on. I took a second trip in 2003 with my cousin Judith, who I found by accident online, and she became my partner in crime. She had been in Lithuania a decade before me and had been doing research about the family story, the family property, the family archive. She had collected many of the documents from our rather large and scattered family and family photos, and, and she'd also been in contact with Galina Baranova, who was the state archivist for Lithuania, and with Rachel Kostanian, who was the associate director of the Jewish Museum in Lithuania. It also happened - as life is such a strange and wonderful mystery tour - that I had a friend from San Francisco who was born in Lithuania, who was not Jewish, but who fled with her mother during World War II, first to Kaliningrad, uh, with the German occupation, uh, into German territory and then finally to New Zealand, and was raised in an expatriate community - Lithuanian community. And she still spoke Lithuanian, and she happened to be going to Lithuania the same time I was going to be there.

24:46 Barbara Michelman: And then, as I begin I just want to add one historical note, most of the Jews from 1791 to 1917 had to live inside the Pale of Settlement. That's an area that included most of Eastern Europe during the Reign of Imperial Russia, and you needed a special pass or were forbidden to live within, inside Russia. Now my grandfather was a draftsman, a, an architect, and so he, he had a special pass, and he worked for a period of time in the Winter Palace. And

because of that, my family was, uh, given dispensation to buy property in Lithuania, and we actually still have the deed to the property. They had five square miles just outside of Vilna, and it, embedded in many of these different photographs are the, some of the documents from my family history. So, and during that trip to Lithuania, I took about 4,500 photographs. So this is a very small portion of what you see. So what I'm going to do today, during that time, along with photographing, I was keeping a journal. I kept a journal on both trips, and I'm going to read one small passage from the original trip, and then most of the material now is this story of my personal engagement with this world as I am traveling through Lithuania.

26:25 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] March 27, 1990, I have always wanted to travel back, and to travel solo, unfettered by restraints, by time or money. I have had the urge to travel, not as a tourist, but as I did when I was young, abandoning time, immersed in language that I understood only by gesture and intonation, swaddled in the layers of civilization that piled up century after century. I have wanted to live again in that different sense of time, the kind of time that links us back to the beginning. I have had the urge to journey back to ancestral grounds, back to those burial grounds, and to let those spirits rise up from ancient earth and sing to me in the language of my past. My mother and father were born in Eastern Europe, and though my mother's and father's family-owned mills and farms, and lived in that part of the world for hundreds of years, they were never Russians or Lithuanians, or Poles. They were Jews, born heretics, born in the Pale. For no Jew in Europe, I came to learn, was ever possessed of a nation. I do not know what their dreams were, nor with what sorrow they said goodbye to their homes, and to the families that remain behind, but I know that who I was, and who I am, is intimately linked to this journey across that continent; that the meaning of my life here is like the tiny mark that the basic particles leave behind on the screen of a cyclotron - where the existence of the particle is known only by the photographic imprint of the trail it leaves behind - but no picture of the thing itself is seen. I wanted to get closer to the source, to the stuff itself. I wanted to know more than the faint markings of my history, or to the history of the diaspora. Still, I would be searching in faith. Perhaps I would be searching in vain. Perhaps the trail of what has been is as close to meaning as life will ever allow. Still, I wanted to know more.

28:54 Barbara Michelman: So most of the rest of this material which is - you are my trial balloon - has never been read before. There are some pieces of text that go with the images, but most of this is first time. So, so this is June 5th, 2003. [reading from her journal] When my father was still alive, I think now, that I was not prepared to journey to Lithuania because of where it might take me. Time has passed and my father is now dead. Of all that transpired between us, most of it which was an antagonism so deep and painful. I see now, for us both, that I did not know him and he in turn did not quite know me. We were halves of a mirror, each reflecting

only a part, unable to see the whole of it. But who I am is not merely a reflection of a man who lived at the core of my existence, but a compilation of everything that has passed before, and deep in the marrow of my life - though I know I am also my mother's child - the imprint of his family is in me. It is my inheritance. It is the face I resemble, the thinking I embody, and the tenacity I have clung to all my life. In a way that nothing I could say to him would change his mind, the same was true of me. This enemy of mine is dead, but the war of difference remains. So I traveled to a place where it began, to aunts and uncles, to grandparents and great-grandparents, whose legacy walks with me, who remind me in the deep solitude that they are the guideposts, and if I am to know my life better, I must travel back as far as I am able.

31:00 Barbara Michelman: So as I mentioned, I had a friend from San Francisco, Dolly, who happened to be in Lithuania at the same time, and she picks me up at the airport, and she takes me to an apartment she's rented. And she's thinking about buying a farm, so she stopped at this little town, Stakliškės, and she breaks open a bottle of Schnapps to pour a bottle of Schnapps. And I about fell off my seat because two weeks earlier I had gone on the Ellis Island index and discovered that my great grandparents were from Stakliškės. So the next morning she offers to drive me to the little village where my family was from, and so this is that, that piece.

31:51 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] We stopped in Stakliškės on the way to the farm. It is a village with three or four streets, with a small cafe, and we stopped for coffee. Dolly is fluent in Lithuanian because her mother and the Lithuanian community in exile in New Zealand held on to their language. Her mother insisted that Dolly speak it at home, believing over half a century ago, that one day Lithuania would be free. Dolly tells my story to the blue-eyed young woman with a thick strong body who is standing behind the counter. She says the old Jewish cemetery is down a dirt road about three kilometers away. Her directions lead us to a quiet thicket on a small rise with a view across the dirt road of an old farm. The overgrown cemetery is ancient and hidden in a grove of trees. Headstones stand helter-skelter. Some graves have been dug up. All the graves are inscribed in Hebrew. There is no way for me to know who is who, but for a moment in the still calm of the countryside a strong wind shudders through the, through the trees. They are here, I think, in the wind - announcing a circle being closed. We have returned, survived, and returned. Strange to stand in the dead stillness and think that this is where I come from. This part of me that was my father - the silent man who I so resembled - who lived here once - whose dreams were wrapped in this world - who learned to ice skate on the frozen winter pond - who read books by candlelight in the long winters, ruining his eyes, with a hunger that became mine. Who was this man who never allowed me to call him father? Something here speaks into that none unnamed world, a past stolen by history. It

is only a moment in the wind but it is as real and true as the gentle rolling terrain before my eyes.

- 34:03 Barbara Michelman: So, I am - Dolly has a car and she speaks Lithuanian - so she's driving us along through the countryside. We stop at this farm and she tells my story to the guy at the farm and we go, he sends us to Butrimonys, which was a, a village that was completely emptied, and then to some other places. And because she's Christian, she wants to go hear some church music because it's a Sunday. And I said, fine. And so we are now, so this is a piece where we, as I start to confront being a Jew in Christian Europe, and something I never quite considered here in the United States. So this is that piece.
- 34:48 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] But we are sightseeing, skimming the surface, where all value is equal. So we move on from Butrimonys - 12 kilometers from Stakliškės - onto Punia, a tiny village along the river where the church has invested in the restoration of the local cathedral, now whitewashed and clean. An old woman the size of a dime with burning blue eyes hobbles up to the cathedral steps. Because it is Sunday, she is expecting to hear mass, but there is none today. Trembling, she approaches the padlocked entrance, peers into the altar, kneels, and prays. After Butrimonys, I wonder what her prayers were, what her fears and hatred was, and were they, and was our extinction amongst them. It is here, in the church, that I feel the separateness again, a separateness not of my making, but one written in the text of these ancient villages. It is impossible to travel here and remain blind to history, impossible to regard the day and not remember all that has passed before, and the price paid. We drive on to Kaunas. I am trying to stay calm and neutral, and maintain my sense of self as an American - a country without a past, and where the opportunity to invent oneself is almost a matter of necessity. Survival in America is predicated not on recalling history, but rather in denying it exists at all. Still, at this moment, it is easier to live in that, because it takes me out of the history and all the death that surrounded. Vilnius, before World War II, had a population of 40 percent Jews. Nearly everyone was killed. Only a handful have survived, and today, in the capital, only 6,000 remain, many of them coming from Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus. We return to ancestral soil trying to find a part that has been missing, but what we find is never what we imagine. I keep my separateness because to embrace this place, this land that was once my ancestors is far too dangerous. I don't believe we bury the past as much as we cover it over. Still, it remains in the fiber, in the woven texture of memory and landscape.
- 37:15 Barbara Michelman: So a few days later, Dolly asks me to join her for dinner at this tea shop and we have an encounter that, um, it was very personal, and, I think, colored, uh, so much of the events. [reading from her journal] Last night I met Dolly at a tea shop to have dinner where I find myself this morning. Our conversation troubled my sleep. She wanted to ask me a question but did not know how. I said,

just ask and finally it came out. Why is it, she asked, that everyone knows about the six million Jews who were killed in the war and the Jews always talk about it, but nothing is said about the Lithuanians who were killed, or sent to Siberia. I replied that her story is no less tragic, and I understand that, but she seemed angry, angry at George, her ex-husband, a Hungarian Jew, at Jewish money, at Zionism, at Jewish control of the media. When I tried to correct the information about corporate control of the media she did not seem to want to listen, and then she went on about the Jewish money lenders, her information directly sourced from Tekla, an exiled Lithuanian, whose information was without context or understanding of the tenuous position of the Jews in the 2000 year history of Christian Europe.

38:46 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] When I suggested that she read the British historian Paul Johnson *History of the Jews*, she waved me off, saying she was not interested in reading any thick book, that she already knew everything she needed to know. And therein lies the heart of hatred, of racism, of antisemitism, of so much pain that plagues the world. It is a worldview that says, don't take my belief system from me. I would rather believe in the simple view that you are all like this, or like that, rather than dig into the textured and nuanced world we inhabit. The conversation loops again to politics. She wonders why Jews are only concerned about Jews, and it doesn't seem to matter that I point out to her we are disproportionately in large numbers in every social movement. All she can see is [Paul] Wolfowitz and [Richard] Perle and [Elena] Kagan, the Jewish neo-neocons who are in the Bush cabinet. At the moment, she is convinced that they are the ones pulling the strings, not [George W.] Bush or [Dick] Cheney or [Donald] Rumsfeld. Her rage is palpable, and for a fleeting second an abyss of hatred burns in her eyes. It is only an instant but it sends a shudder through me. It is a sad and frightening moment.

40:06 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] This is my friend who is refusing to see in her assumptions, that we are all individuals, and that stereotypes about Jews, and money, and power are just that, and they do irrevocable harm. In the long June night, we are no longer Americans. We are the old sad story of this tiny country and of the history of Europe. I find, I part from my friend deeply saddened that this thing is now between us. I see that she feels unjustly wounded. She is bitter about the money and the divorce, but I am not the one who has done whatever it is that she believes has been done to her. But bitterness does not answer to reason and last night the 2000-year-old complaint of Christian Europe pointed its finger at the familiar point of origin. How do we find our way back? How do we lay the past to rest without covering it over? This is a journey into the heart of understanding, into places I did not want to walk because of, I was afraid of what I might find here. In our conversation last night, I felt the separation again and I am reminded of the difference. She is Lithuanian and I am a Jew. Though I can

trace my father's family back to the early 1800s, I will never be Lithuanian, because I am a Jew. That is what the conversation tells me.

- 41:44 Barbara Michelman: So it was with that on my mind the first time I went to Panerai, which were the killing fields where they took the Jews from the Vilna Ghetto, uh, to be, uh, murdered, and, uh, it's it's about six or eight miles from the center of town. So it's, it's very close. So, this is the first time, and I went alone. [reading from her journal] Uh, this afternoon I took the train to Panerai. Ravens in the Panerai Forest were calling from the woods just to the west. I followed the road from the train station out of town walking south because there was no marker from the station pointing to the killing fields. After walking 40, 45 minutes in the wrong direction, I turned back towards the train, ready to quit, when I saw a sign facing me - Panerai Memorial, one kilometer. I followed the arrow from a quiet, down a quiet road that led to a parking lot with one car parked at the edge of the woods. Five people clustered together had their heads bowed in prayer, or so it appeared from a distance. A young blonde girl and a young boy on a bicycle followed them. I walked down the path towards the memorial into the woods listening to the birds and to the shrill of the ravens above.
- 43:15 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] They were part of this, guardians who keep announcing what was here. I followed the footpath into the killing fields and sat before the monuments. Tears crept down my face here in the woods around Panerai, the place where my father was born. I understood his silence. He must have known what happened here: 70,000 Jews and another 20 or 30,000 others killed on this site, the village of his birth. His uncle, who could not get a visa with his family to leave for America, was shot here by the Germans in their loathing for something I still do not understand. It is here in the killing fields that I lost him. It is here that the rabbinical boy, who denied god, who turned toward the world seeking salvation, and [Karl] Marx and [Vladimir] Lenin, lost his faith in the possibility of human decency. I wept today at Panerai for the silence that became his life, and for the spirit that was broken on these bloody fields. It is 60 years since the massacre and still, we do not forget, we the five from Israel and myself have come to remember, to say Kaddish for the dead because these are the footsteps of my ancestors, the birthplace of my father, and my aunts and uncles. In this sad and dreadful silence, I have finally come to understand them.
- 44:51 Barbara Michelman: So, my cousin Judith finally arrives, and then we start to travel together, together. But as I mentioned, she had been in contact with the state archivist. So the state archivist had been searching our family records for months, and we had an appointment for her to, uh, show us what she was able to unearth because all of these records had to be searched by hand, and they were just all coming back from the Soviet Union because, during Soviet rule all, all of the state documents went to Moscow. And they were just now beginning to get those documents back. Some of the books we looked at were 5-600 years old. [reading

from her journal] Judith, my cousin from Jacksonville - who met me here a few days ago - was given the marriage certificate of her father and mother - my Aunt Lena and Uncle Harry - by Galina who spent months searching the records, because very few records are in the computer yet. We have a letter from my Great Uncle Phillip in which he writes about meeting my grandparents and aunt and uncle on 57 Novigrad Street. Galina tells us the reason we can't find the street is that Novigrad is the old name under Polish rule, and she writes down the new name in Lithuanian.

- 46:15 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] It is very near a hotel, in the old section of town. We are reclaiming our past in tiny pieces, a word at a time. There are ghosts on every street, silent footsteps in the landscape of my father, of my father's father, and his father before him. Mikhailovich to Mikelman to Michelman in the mid-1830s. Galina tells us that Jews moved around a lot and often avoided the use of last names, to try to evade conscription into the Czar's army. Conscription in the 19th century was for life, until the end of the century when it was changed to a six-year service. Mikhail, which was probably the name of the land owner my great-great-grandfather worked for, but likely it was changed to Mikelman because Mikhailovich is not Jewish and Mikelman is. Judith has a photograph of my grandfather in his uniform, taken before the end of the 19th century. Conscripted into the army for a six-year term, he worked for the Czar in St. Petersburg and was given special permission to buy land. The document is still in our family records. Galina tells me there is no record of my father's birth certificate because so much was destroyed at Panerai, only of my uncle and a brother, who died. I feel empty again but Judith tells me that Béla, who was over 90 and who grew up close to my families, my father's family, in Lithuania said that all the children were born in Panerai. Very little, never quite clear, only shadows of shadows, but it is still something more than the void of negation.
- 47:54 Barbara Michelman: So as we are traveling through this, we go to the small Jewish center that was being resurrected in Vilna uh and it was being run by Dr. [Shimon] Alperovich who my cousin Judith thought was a distant relative of hers. And, uh, um Dr. [Shimon] Alperovich came from a wealthy family, so in that period between 1939 and 1941 when under an agreement between Stalin and Hitler, for that short period, uh, Lithuania was under, uh, Soviet rule. So when the Bolsheviks came in - and Dr. [Shimon] Alperovich's immediate family was wealthy - they shipped him off to the gulags in Siberia. So the irony of that was, he was the only one in his family to survive because all of the other member of, members of his family who remained in Lithuania were lost. He lost 50 members of his family. So this is a piece of us visiting that.
- 49:08 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Civilization is woven into a million silken threads, complicated, beautiful and awful, and tragic. This afternoon we went to the soup kitchen, a small center where Jewish pensioners who came to

Lithuania from Poland, Russia, and Belarus after the fall of the Soviet Union are cared for. They are fragments of humanity who did not escape before the war, who survived in the East, damaged and broken. They have come here to Vilnius, a city once considered the Jerusalem of Europe, birthplace of Eastern Europe's cultural and intellectual Jewish renaissance, to find what was left of their families and community. But I am afraid to take a picture of them, afraid of being a thief, of stealing the last bit of humanity that remains on their faces. Perhaps it is all in my mind and the separation is mine. These ruined faces, faces that have lost their suppleness, angled only towards death. I do not want to pick up my camera. I have already seen more than I dare. In truth, I shrink from what I see, offended by such possibility. How often I have asked myself during these last few days, how do they go on living on a hundred dollars a month with all the shadows that surround them?

- 50:38 Barbara Michelman: So one of the things that I was so struck by as I was taking this trip is, there was no relief, that there was this not much respite as I stepped further and further into the history of this place - not just my family, but the history that was everywhere that I looked. So we, as I mentioned, my cousin was in contact with Rachel Kostanian, who was the, uh, associate director of the Jewish Museum and so she took us into the Vilna Ghetto. And the Germans invaded Lithuania on June 22, 1941 - which also happened to be the wedding of my cousin Judith here in the United States - and by August the ghetto - August [19]41 - the ghetto was established. And by early [19]43 the ghetto - the whole ghetto - was liquidated. So there was a short period of time, um, and then they were all taken by train to Panerai.
- 51:48 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Stories of the ghetto have been told so often that I have become nearly immune, and did not want to hear it again. Walking through the new ghetto in the afternoon we were followed by wind, dark clouds, and rain. We went into the Jewish Ghetto Theater. Rachel, whose personal story is similar to that of Dr. [Shimon] Alperovich, is our guide today. She described the German invasion, how Jews were gathered into this compound. She pointed to the building where the Judenrat - the Jewish council - once administered the law in the ghetto, deciding who would live and who would die in order to satisfy the SS [Schutzstaffel] lists and quotas. Women children, the old were marched to Panerai - 3,000 today - 2,000 tomorrow - you to the work camp - you to the death camp. Guilt and shame plague the living, who agonized over the question, whom do you choose? When in truth, there was no choosing.
- 52:47 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Nothing in the order of world events during that time could have intervened in that drift. Something terrible had been turned loose by Hitler's rise to power and everything had been preordained by the military force he brought to bear. What sad tragedy to think that responsibility left, uh, rested with those without power, or were in control of their

own destiny. Did it matter if they chose this one today, or that one tomorrow? It was an illusion, a shadow within a shadow to think that life or death rested solely in their hands. Temporal power rested ultimately with those who carried the weapons. The questions then are the questions now that plague me now. The beast is always in the background noise. Listen closely, it growls in the Patriot Act, in the bombing of Iraq, in the gathering up of citizens, holding them in detention camps, painting all with the same brush, sowing terror wrapped in a flag. A chill wind is growing, blowing across the world again.

- 53:59 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Rachel tells us the story of the partisan in the Vilna ghetto. [Jacob] Gens, the head of the Jewish council, was ordered by the SS [Schutzstaffel] commander to turn in [Yitzhak] Wittenberg, the leader of the partisans, or the commander threatened to destroy the whole ghetto. The ghetto cried for Wittenberg's head. His own members hit him and he was discovered. There is a standoff in the ghetto - Jew against Jew. The SS [Schutzstaffel] threaten again, demanding that Gens do his job. Finally, Wittenberg is confronted by his own partisans. Unable to imagine giving up without a fight, he asks their opinion. They say, turn yourself in. He pleads for poison instead, and they say, no, the SS want you alive. The threat of total annihilation hangs over their decision. Wittenberg, for the sake of the whole, turns himself over to the SS. The next day he is found dead in his cell, and two weeks later, despite the SS promise to leave the ghetto alone if Wittenberg surrendered, the whole ghetto was wiped out.
- 55:07 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Rachel looked up and said, what would you have done? Who can say what any of us might do? How can we know, in the privileged calm of our comfortable lives, what any of us might choose? All I think as I listen to this modern version of Judas - beware the beast is growling around the edges. What can be gleaned, I ask myself, from such tragedy? What is to be learned about the immensity of such brutishness, and is it different from Rwanda, or Kosovo, or the killing fields of Cambodia during the Reign of Terror under Pol Pot? Is one suffering greater than another? I think not. It is only that today Rachel has given the people faces and names, tells their story so intimately and with such detail, that she sweeps us into their individual lives and their collective suffering.
- 56:26 Barbara Michelman: I mean, history tells us not only about the past but it can also tell us about ourselves, and when I wrestled with how I felt about going, it wasn't just because of the past history, but what this nation was up to during the war in Iraq. And it certainly raises questions again today, with some of the behavior that's going on - that a government that is supposed to represent us. So about a day or two later Judith, who had arrived after me and hadn't been to Paneriai, uh, so we went back. Uh, we went back with, uh, Rachel and a few other people.

- 57:22 Barbara Michelman: So this is the second trip, and it's June 16th, 2003. [reading from her journal] A wail is heard through the drops of rain. Late this afternoon, I stood again in the woods of Paneriai. The sound of the train in the distance haunted each of us. We here today have come once more to say a prayer for the dead, to pay homage to the lost, but the memorial at Paneriai is overgrown weeds, bound in the killing pits, trash covers the edges, and children from, from the village ride along paved paths pointing toy guns at this handful of foreigners who have come to this nearly forgotten place. Who, I wonder, will hold this space when this generation passes? Who will remember Paneriai, or the life, the art, the music, the poetry, the science, that was stolen in these quiet woods?
- 58:23 Barbara Michelman: So, my cousin and I left Vilna and we hired a driver and a car, and she was also our translator. So as we went through the small shtetls around this rather small country, we were able to ask questions. And, uh, um, so we went to Trakai and there's a restored castle, and my cousin told the story of how, uh, my aunt - her mother - and we have a photograph of her playing in front of the castle, in this little lacy dress, when she was about five or six years old. Um but she, uh, was told that she had an uncle who had died at Semeliškės, which is a small village - a shtetl somewhere in part of rural Lithuania. So we go looking for the grave of our uncle. [reading from her journal] We went searching for the grave of an uncle of my cousin Judith - buried, she was told, in Semeliškės. We asked in the small town where the Jewish cemetery was and drove up a dirt road. A small wooden marker with a sign announced a memorial. It pointed down another dirt road, so overgrown it had not been passable in years. A green rusting fence covered the perimeter of the of the clearing. Twenty or 30-foot pits had been marked on the edges by small stones.
- 1:00:01 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] They were mass graves, six of them, lined in a field, inside the fence. On the far end, two or three headstones marked individual burials. The rest were gone. A plaque on a large headstone explained that 800 Jews were killed by the Germans and their willing co-conspirators. The sylvan woods of Lithuania are filled with these pits. Standing here in the forgotten field of Semeliškės, I understand the insistence in Rachel's voice reminding us that remembrance is redemption. Once more unwilling tears rolled down my cheeks at the obscenity of such silence. I am weary of the death I see everywhere on the landscape here, weary of the empty woods, empty houses, and small villages that once thrived with this strange race from which I come, weary too of the communist dreams that also died here, of the empty agricultural collectives that have abandoned, that have been abandoned, and of the grey brutish architecture. Lithuania is slowly waking up from a long nightmare that has held it captive for centuries. Who knows what it will become when this new generation comes alive under its own steam and reaches maturity.

- 101:30 Barbara Michelman: And then, one of the last days on this trip we went to the family land, where my cousin had been ten years before. [reading from her journal] My father's family were millers. They owned three mills, one in Belarus, one in Paneriai, and one in Novigrad, on the bend in the Vilnia River. Two days ago, my cousin Judith and Mooty - our guide and translator - helped us to find the old mill. According to Judith, ten years earlier nothing was left. It is all overgrown and the waterfalls were not accessible. Now Belmontas, which is the new name for Novigrad, has become a thing of wonder. It could not have been a more beautiful day when we began our search, blue sky, green fields, and bright sun. We wound down a country road just on the outskirts of Vilnius, along the river, and Mooty told us that there had been several old mills along the river back in the 19th century and in the early 20th century. We approached the spot where Judith had visited 10 years earlier. It was nearly transformed. The old millworks jet out across the falls, nestled down the small wooded river valley.
- 1:02:52 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] Below the falls there is a new restaurant. Outdoor wooden terraces ramble up the gentle riverbank, in the shade of a birch and spruce forest. The decks are filled with flowers. The grassy hillsides have been scattered with ancient sleds, threshing machines, lanterns, hand-made farm tools, and an ancient diesel engine. On this dreamy sun-filled morning, I am convinced that the old engine I photographed must have been the engine that my grandmother enticed a German soldier in World War I to import for her in order to grind groats faster. It was the first such engine in Lithuania, and it made my family very rich. I look at this place, which was a, which a hundred years ago was the place my father and his family lived. The family house was across the river, on the other side of the footbridge, and up a path, along a wooded hillside. In our search, this morning Judith and I claimed the old tin-roofed house with the wooden columns and rambling porch as our own, but all we really have outside of our imagination is the knowledge that they once listened to these falls, saw the same trees, and knew the beauty of the Vilnia River finding its way towards the Baltic.
- 1:04:15 Barbara Michelman: [reading from her journal] The dreams they had still live in me and in my cousin Judith. Nothing here today saddens me. This day, my father's birthday - June 18th - is filled with new life and regeneration. I like to think that they would have been pleased to see that this place they had to flee resonates today with laughter, with children playing along the river, and with people sitting on the banks breaking bread together. This is the timeless flow, preserved like a tiny gem, beyond the reach of the fields of Paneriai and the covenant with life that was broken there. In a few days I will be returning to my family, my children, and grandchildren, grateful to have walked the landscape of my father, to have smelled the green fields, and experienced the long June days. How sweet it must have been to have fished in the river, and wandered over the fields covered today with wild wildflowers. Which memory do we pluck from the past? Which do we cling to as our talismans and guides? I can hardly imagine the courage it took to give up

everything they had, to come across the Atlantic, determined to remain who they were, and to walk this life with dignity. It was my grandparent's legacy to us, the name I inherited, and though nothing can change the past or wipe away the destruction that was here.

- 1:05:54 Barbara Michelman: And then there's one small coda to all of this, that a few days after that Dolly invited us to dinner and offered to take me to the airport, and with some reluctance, I agreed. [reading from her journal] When I said goodbye to Dolly - who drove me to the airport - I knew that something was still not repaired. We have each come here separately - she the Lithuanian and me the Jew. Our stories are both separate and together woven into the text, not just of this place, but in the story of the world. I said goodbye to her at the airport, airport, not certain that the past between us will ever be completely buried, because our conversation in the tea room lingers in my mind. But each of us still reaches toward the other, and perhaps that's all we have. And if we can repair the world at all, we repair it one small story, one small conversation at a time.
- 1:07:17 Deborah Hertz: Well, you had one one sentence in there that was terribly interesting. You said you didn't - you were in the museum in Vilna - and you said there were people, people in the museum. As I understood you correctly, and you didn't want to take their pictures because -
- 1:07:32 Barbara Michelman: It wasn't a museum. It was a soup kitchen.
- 1:07:35 Deborah Hertz: The soup kitchen.
- 1:07:37 Barbara Michelman: It was a soup kitchen and they had uh come from other parts of Eastern Europe to try and find what was left of the community in, in Vilna
- 1:07:48 Deborah Hertz: So you said, in a very interesting line, you said you didn't want to take the picture because you felt it would rob them of something. And you haven't shown us, in this room, the the photographs that I hope everyone will go out to see in the exhibition. Um, I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the contrast between saying, in the beginning, I took 4,500 photos but at that moment you felt the photo would rob them of something. And I, I, I wonder if you could talk about that.
- 1:08:24 Barbara Michelman: Well I think it's a little like the first time I made a decision to go to, uh, to go to Ponar or Panerai without a camera. I didn't want the insulation. I - as painful as it was - I felt that what I was being asked was to stand there, and look, and, and be, and feel, and not to allow anything intercede in that. And there was something about looking at them that was so painful. I felt like I would be a voyeur, and I didn't want to do that. And by being a voyeur, it felt like I would be taking something from them that was my own. And it's one reason there I don't do street photography that way. I am very reluctant to stick a camera in somebody's

face that way. It's just, it's my personal, but it's, it's - it, you know, that's all I can say. Does that answer your question?

- 1:09:28 Deborah Hertz: Well, if you could talk a little bit. Do you have other pictures that are hidden behind that one, as it were?
- 1:09:34 Barbara Michelman: Oh, there are - there's - you mean other - there's more in this... I don't know why this one is up but -
- 1:09:40 Deborah Hertz: But I wonder if you could talk a little bit about it? The differences between those.
- 1:09:45 Barbara Michelman: Well these, I was there and this was the synagogue in, in Vilna and, and these were the rabbi's kids, and they were playing outside, and it was a joyful moment, and they were happy to have me photograph them. And this photo over here was actually a photo - these two photos were taken by Roman Vishniac - and I photographed them off of the museum. I didn't photograph them. I photographed the photograph. Okay? The arch there is, was in the ghetto and they were restoring the old cemetery, the old synagogue. So that's what that is, yeah.
- 1:10:17 Deborah Hertz: So what's the difference between the photographs that you use in these montages, and the photographs that you did not take exactly?
- 1:10:30 Barbara Michelman: You mean that in that instance? I just looked in their faces and I just saw too much pain. And I recorded it here, but I, I just - there was something in me that would not allow me to pick up a camera. I can't tell you why. That was just my experience. I just, I, I mean the well of suffering that I saw was, I mean. It was, sorry that's - I'm not a photojournalist.
- 1:11:03 Speaker 1: Thank you for this dramatic and emotion, emotional presentation. I think part of us - I'm here - I think part of us sitting here listening to you are also affected emotionally by what you had to say. You also mentioned, maybe twice, maybe three times, some of the repercussions of this beastly period and I have a question to which there is no answer right now. Maybe you have a quick answer, I'm not sure. I'm going to ask Susanne Hillman to ask all of us in writing - she has the database - why are we here? What do we want by emotionally describing our pasts? Now, I have an explanation, my own. But I'm sure if there are 100 people here, there are 120 opinions, and I believe that is very important. My own basis for this all is, we more than many have to emphasize that nothing of this type of behavior of the human base will ever be repeated. And this happens. I just happen to get a article today, in this morning, and if you see, if you can integrate, remember what is happening in the world. We are going down a slope right now and how do we, who are so emotional and have good reasons to be emotional, how do we contribute in our society, in the United States and worldwide, to stop this slope? But I think many of us have other opinions as to why we are

commemorating - in a terrific series, Susanne - why we are repeating these stories, which brought me again today to some tears.

- 1:13:46 Barbara Michelman: Would you like me - I can only say as, as a human being - let's start with that - that I think what links me to any other human being is our capacity to feel one another, and to experience one another uh, in, in, in, on that level which is not only suffering, it's joy, it's all of it. And I think the danger that if I see what when I look around what's happening is not to get caught in the callousness and to forget what it is that joins us all together. And I feel, as well I think, that what I have been attempting to do as a photographer, and as an artist, is to bring that to people. So, even if it hadn't been their experience, they can recognize themselves in it. And I'll tell you a quick story that I was living in Montana for 10 years, and during that time I got stuck on this series. I was four or five years into it. I did not know where to go, and I dropped it. It was just sitting there. I pulled out a piece that was not complete, but it was part of the series, and it was lying on my cutting table when two women from Helena, Montana walked in. And they're looking at all the other work in my studio, and their eyes fall on that piece.
- 1:15:33 Barbara Michelman: They were absolutely stunned, and it resonated with them, and in a way that was the impetus for me to carry on because I wasn't just looking to create a static museum piece. I was looking to create a dialogue, a question, an open-ended question about who we are and what are we up to at any moment. And when they looked at that from such a completely different background, it gave me a sense that at least what I was attempting to do was on the right path. And that's when I finished the project. And then I had one more thing happen that was also very indicative. I had hung it and previewed the work in my studio before it came down to San Francisco. And I had a woman come in whose husband was, uh, uh, a native of of the Blackfoot tribe. She goes in and and she's reading, and she was from Montana. You know, and she's reading the things, and she's looking at the images, and she's reading each piece. And she turns around and she says to me, this is my husband's story. And you know, in so many ways, we have never come to terms with what has happened to the Native people in this country, and so when that work, which was up, which was so distant but not distant at all. And so, to me, that is, that is at least my my answer.
- 1:17:00 Speaker 2: Thank you for coming today. I'm over here - over here - way overturned. I don't know left from right, so I'm not sure what to tell you. Anyway, um, thank you for your, your gracious piece. I just have a quick, what year, I missed what year this was?
- 1:17:20 Barbara Michelman: There were two trips. The first trip was in 1990 and this, but not to Lithuania, because I couldn't get in then. There was a civil war in Lithuania in 1990 when I was there. And then the second trip was in 2003 when I went to Lithuania with my cousin.

- 1:17:38 Speaker 2: So I was wondering if, you know, kind of at the end of your story you hinted at the possibility or that, you know, in this land, you know, there there's happiness now, and smiling, and good things, and sort of this possibility of you know *mano y mano* with the Lithuanian woman. Um, I'm wondering if you'd been back to Lithuania. Or if you were, um, aware of some of the work that's going on in central Europe to bring Jewish communities back?
- 1:18:14 Barbara Michelman: I was aware of that. I, I haven't been back to, I haven't been back to Lithuania. There was a period of time when we - I come from a big family. I have lots of cousins, and, uh, we were looking at potentially making a claim to the property that had been lost. But what I saw happening, and I would have been the the point person on that, was it began to pull my family apart. And I said I'm not doing that. That's the gift. The gift is that we're here, and we have our lives. I did not want to do that.
- 1:18:56 Speaker 2: Maybe your next, your next big adventure though would be to go back and see the wonderful work that's being done, and that, you know, populating central Europe with Jews and Jewish life. Um, a wonderful sequel to what you've talked about today, and raising Jewry. It's all good.
- 1:19:20 Barbara Michelman: Thank you.
- 1:19:22 Speaker 3: On that note, thank you for being here. I was wondering, um, if you were aware of the Joint and the work that they do, uh, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which is funding - along with the international JCCs [Jewish Community Centers] - this resurgence of Jewish institutions in Eastern Europe. I was in Warsaw and Krakow. They have Jewish Community Centers built on the ashes of people, and they are vibrant and unbelievably active. It's just, boggles the mind, and there's more Jews in Berlin now, as you mentioned. Huge numbers of Israelis have gone to Berlin. And so, I can't figure that one out at all but I think that the work that's being done - if there's something that we can do to make a difference to preserve the history - so that the fact that we're all here is wonderful, but I don't see any young people. I don't see any people - I mean really young -
- 1:20:29 Barbara Michelman: My grandson is back there. Hi Colin. [laughter] My beautiful grandson!
- 1:20:37 Speaker 3: Yes, very few. But there's not enough to learn about these things. Good, I'm really glad that you are young, but the interest needs to be created.
- 1:20:51 Barbara Michelman: So one of the things that I had always intended with this project was that it, it was not static, but simply to use it to open up a conversation - not just about the past - but what the heck is going on in this nation today. And are there signs? Are there things that we need to consider? And how do we deal with it? And not in that diatribe, but to think more deeply about who we are, and what we are up to.

- 1:21:17 Speaker 3: I have another question about the Lithuanian friend that you had. She said she was raised in a very Lithuanian community in New Zealand, preserving language, culture. I'm wondering if she also preserved the cultural attitudes of Lithuanians towards Jews. It sounded like she was spouting from history.
- 1:21:38 Barbara Michelman: Well I think she was torn. She also married a Hungarian Jew.
- 1:21:43 Speaker 3: Well, that must have really -
- 1:21:45 Barbara Michelman: Well, and so that's what I'm saying. That, that, that we people are not simple. You know, we're complex, and we are torn, and we have this feeling, and that feeling, and it's how - You know, and to me, the hard work is, in the moment that I feel this rage, is how do I not simply succumb to it, and find a way back to bring some understanding to myself and hopefully to the relationship. You know, that to me, I mean if it were easy it would be easy.
- 1:22:19 Speaker 3: Thank you very much.
- 1:22:21 Barbara Michelman: You're welcome. Yes?
- 1:22:26 Speaker 4: You might be wondering why I'm standing. Well, and you hear my accent, and my voice is very [unclear], but most sincerely I'm standing here in respect of people like you and 19 million other people whose lives were taken away from them. You can hear my accent. I'm not from the United States, nor from Europe. I'm from Israel. In fact, I'm not from Israel. I was born when it was still Palestine and I would like to share my first memory that is so emotionally laden, that you can hear that I'm almost getting to tears. So, I was five and a half in the suburb of a metropolitan city in Israel. One morning a bus appeared. The person who sit over here next to me knows the story. So we were all ordered, quote-unquote, to get on the bus and we ended up in Jerusalem. The place we, we were shipped, quote-unquote, to - that's the way it felt at least, five and a half - who wants to go nowhere not knowing where, to the first Museum of Holocaust, in Jerusalem. And yes, indeed the trembling in my voice is due to the memory of all the pictures, all the words, all the feelings that all of us had over there.
- 1:24:14 Speaker 4: And I would like to jump the boat so to speak, and tell you that I admire what you said, and what you did, and did not do. Yeah, I'm a psychologist, and most of my time, while I was working here in town, was devoted to help people with their emotions, with their memories. I had two neighbors next to my parent's home where I was raised, of course in Israel, on both sides. Their homes used to belong, those people are not here anymore, of course, to each couple happened to be that one of the couples met in - excuse me - in Israel. Each one lost all the members of the family. They met. They married. They had children. I know the children. I'm still in touch with them even though I'm far from five and a half, more than ten times that, but I will never ever forget this memory.

- 1:25:35 Speaker 4: And I would like to thank you for what you have done now because I did not have any camera when I went to Jerusalem. No one handed me any brochure or lit any candle, but it's deeply embedded in my heart and the hearts of many other people who were with me at that time that I'm still in touch with, friends from first grade. That's what we should do, just what you preached, quote-unquote, so vitally, so intellectually. And I feel indebted to you, indebted to you, and to 19 million other people who were murdered and killed regardless of the age, gender, or religious belongingness. So I would like to translate one sentence from the patriots who fought the Nazis, and it's one sentence. The song is very well known. The melody so too. It says, don't you say this is my last breath and the song was sang by probably millions of people who were densely occupying trains of [unclear] animals and they passed away, not necessarily in the concentration camps, but on those trains. There was no air, there was no water, there was no food. So thank you again, because what you brought to life is don't you say, you did not, you did not take any picture, but you surely remember via your photograph, via your words, here today and most likely many other places. So I would like to bow down to you. Thank you and thank you from the deep chambers of my heart.
- 1:27:44 Barbara Michelman: Thank you. Thank you. That is very kind. Thank you so much.
- 1:27:48 Susanne Hillman: Thank you all for coming. You may now approach Barbara, and we have a little bit of time, uh, to mingle. And thank you for attending, for paying attention, and uh see you next time.