

# **COMPARING GENERATIONAL PORTRAYAL IN THE HOLOCAUST GRAPHIC NOVEL MEMOIR**

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## Abstract

As we study the descendants of Holocaust survivors and the testimonies they give, we see how the effects of the event are not stagnant but move from the witnesses to their offspring. To better understand these narratives when they are told through different mediums, they have been divided into “generations”: the first, 1.5, second, third, and so on and so forth. Susan Suleiman describes the 1.5 generation as the child survivors who suffered through trauma, and later, as adults, reflect on their childhood experiences (277; Felman and Laub 1992; Langer 1991, as cited in Suleiman 291). The second-generation of survivors are the children of those who survived the Holocaust (Suleiman 277). Marianne Hirsch uses the term ‘postmemory’ to refer to the memory that the second-generation has of their parents’ traumatic events, something that they did not experience, yet suffer the effects from (4). Since the generations have different ways of processing and remembering the event, the memory of the Holocaust is represented differently by each.

In this thesis, I analyze how generational memory of the Holocaust is shown through the artistic mediums of three graphic novel memoirs: *We Are on Our Own* (2006) by Miriam Katin, and *Maus I: A Survivor’s Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986) and *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991) by Art Spiegelman. Katin’s novel represents the 1.5 generation and both of Spiegelman’s represent the second-generation. Through this analysis I have found that although there are differences in how the generations tell their stories, they also share important similarities.

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## Introduction: An Investigation into the Holocaust's Generational Memory Portrayal in the Graphic Novel

*However, the stories my mother told me and the knowledge of all that happened were a constant unwanted, uninvited presence in my life... When I discovered this illustrative way of telling serious stories, I felt that this would be my way to express myself.*

-Miriam Katin<sup>1</sup>

My first introduction to the Holocaust was in elementary school, and it came from the children's book *Who Was Anne Frank* (2007) (Abramson and Who HQ). The illustration of Frank on the cover looked like me with short brown hair and brown eyes, and she was about my age at the time. I read further about how she had an older sister, as did I, and liked to write in her diary, as did I. I felt connected to her. I thought how strange it was that the world would have no idea who this young girl was, her story or her family's, had she not written her experience in her diary. This was the first book that sparked my interest in Holocaust literature.

Despite the connection I felt, I knew we were quite different as I was an American child born in a time of peace, and Anne Frank was a child of the Holocaust. It was not until I had gotten older and began to study the concept of memory as theory that I realized her diary and this children's book are forms of memorializing the Holocaust. As many may know, the Holocaust took the lives of about six million Jews (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC) and millions of others. Out of this horrific tragedy came books, plays, movies, and comics, fictional and non-fictional, created by survivors and non-survivors. Graphic novelist Art Spiegelman once joked how "now there's an annual kind of Oscar award for best Holocaust movie" highlighting how popular the event has become in the media (*Art Spiegelman – Talk* 06:48-06:51). However, from these works, people have been able to learn what the Holocaust is as I have.

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<sup>1</sup> (Katin "A Conversation" 237)

But for children and descendants of those who experienced the Holocaust, they do not have to learn about it only from these types of outside sources. The tragedies can be learned from inside the family unit. In the most personal effort, survivors tell their children and grandchildren of their experiences in the Holocaust, if they are able and choose to. However, family members of survivors may not have heard their family's entire stories growing up. For instance, child survivor Miriam Katin was not told about her and her mother's experiences until much later in life (*Jewish Survivor* 48:45-48:55). A similar thing can be said about Art Spiegelman, a child of survivors, as he too said he did not get his parents' full story until he was an adult (*Art Spiegelman – Talk* 04:27-04:35). Yet, whether or not a person knows his or her parents' or grandparents' story, the event will still have an inadvertent impact on the family throughout their lives, due to the aftereffects it had on the parents, and the family members they lost.

What is interesting to see is how these child survivors and children of survivors have a somewhat adopted memory of the event because of their literal and figurative proximity and/or distance to/from it. This occurs even despite not experiencing it or not having the cognitive capabilities to fully experience and remember it (i.e., a young child survivor). The important question then is: How can they retell their family member's story? Is it even possible to do? How should this retelling be done? This is what led me to my research.

Many scholars have already done research on the topics of the generations of Holocaust survivors and their generational memory. For example, scholar Susan Suleiman has an article about the 1.5 generation of Holocaust survivors called "The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust" (2002). In this well-known article, she discusses the qualities of the 1.5 generation, focusing on their vast age range and how that produces different experiences based on factors such as their cognitive level, familial status, home country, and year

of Nazi persecution. One interesting question Suleiman introduces is: How do child survivors remember their childhood experience in their adulthood based on their cognitive stage during the experience? (282). By analyzing this, we can compare the effects of the Holocaust shown in adulthood by the different ages of impact, and further determine differences within the 1.5 generation.

The idea of how memory is impacted by generational experience is also brought up in Marianne Hirsch's book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012). Here, Hirsch discusses how the second-generation of Holocaust witnesses have a memory of their parents' experiences, although they did not experience it first-hand. She calls this phenomenon postmemory (3-4) She uses Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as a key reference point in her discussion (30). Suleiman and Hirsch's sources are key tools in the research of this thesis because they provide an explanation to some of Katin and Spiegelman's choices of aesthetics and rhetoric.

As I went deeper into my investigation of generational Holocaust studies, I became interested in how generational memory was both narrated and illustrated through the genre of the graphic novel. Chapters from *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches* (2008) edited by Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman were very informative in understanding some of the history of the graphic novel, how the Holocaust has been portrayed in graphic novels, and how different generations of survivors have been able to tell their story. In addition, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (2015) by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey was a great source in understanding more about what separates the comic from the graphic novel. From this research, I decided to combine and expand on the ideas of showing how generational Holocaust survivors

and their memory functions in the graphic novel to help us better understand how we can re-tell and re-create a traumatic event.

Thus, in this thesis I will examine how the 1.5 generation and second-generation of Holocaust survivors attempt to tell their personal stories through the graphic novel. First, I analyze graphic novels as a genre, and since this genre has been under scrutiny, I present the critiques given against the graphic novel. I assert that graphic novels should be able to portray such a serious event as the Holocaust and discuss the ways in which they successfully do this.

Second, I will analyze the graphic novel *We Are on Our Own* (2006), written and illustrated by Miriam Katin. This novel represents the 1.5 generation of Holocaust survivors since Katin is a child survivor (Katin, *Jewish Survivor* 07:29-07:38). Katin's memoir tells the story of how she and her mother fled from their home in Budapest, Hungary from 1944-1945 because of the Nazis' rule (*We Are*). She was only a young child at this time with limited memory of the event, and her mother only told her all that they had went through when she became an adult (Katin, "A Conversation" 237). In this chapter, I read the novel through the lens of Suleiman's article about the 1.5 generation to see how the effects of Katin's membership in this generation has affected her portrayal. I also discuss the theory of memory latency, according to trauma expert Cathy Caruth who works with Sigmund Freud's theory of latency in memory in her article "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History" (1991). I discuss how a child survivor can look back at his or her experience through an adult perspective and retell his or her story.

Third, I analyze Art Spiegelman's graphic novels *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986) and *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991). Since Art Spiegelman was born after the Holocaust to two survivors, this novel represents the

second-generation. In *Maus I* and *II*, the character portrayal of Art Spiegelman, who he calls “Artie”, interviews his father, Vladek, to get the story of his and his wife’s, Artie’s mother Anja, survival of the Holocaust. Since the author Spiegelman was born after the Holocaust, he does not have his own memory of the event; however, the effects of the Holocaust were apparent in his life. I analyze Spiegelman’s graphic novels through the understanding of Hirsch’s theory of postmemory. I show how a member of the second-generation, someone who did not experience the Holocaust, can explain and illustrate the event based on another survivor’s memory.

In both of these chapters, I analyze not only how the authors’ writing shows their generational memory, but also how the aesthetics of the graphic novel display their memory.

## Why the Graphic Novel?: Pushing the Boundaries of Holocaust Literature

*“For me, comics are just a medium, and now the world is catching up to me. It didn’t seem to me that comics were a lesser form. They were the highest form I could imagine. Just for the most part it was just used stupidly, but so is most paint.”*

-Art Spiegelman<sup>2</sup>

Out of the many different genres and mediums to examine generational memory, I have chosen to look at the graphic novel. I decided on this because I wanted to examine how memory can both be told and shown, through literature and illustration, and the graphic novel seemed like a great genre to do this in. However, through my research I discovered that there has been some push back not just on showing the Holocaust through the graphic novel, but the graphic novel as a genre in of itself. For this reason, I decided to ‘clear the air’ about the possible discontentment with Holocaust graphic novels. In this chapter, I will examine the differences between the graphic novel and its common associate, the ‘comic’, the cons of the graphic novel, especially with portraying the Holocaust, and my believed pros of the graphic novel.

To define the graphic novel, one needs to examine its predecessor, the comic. Writer Josh Lambert explains the comic is associated with children’s literature because it resembles a picture book, which according to the *Norton Anthology of Children’s Literature*, the source for his argument, is the most suited literature for children (45). Lambert argues that adults were readers of comics, even when they were first published in America in the late 1800s. However, critics, like psychologist Frederic Wertham, ensured the comic’s link to juveniles by advocating for its mature censorship and suitability for children. The Comics Code was also followed by publishers, which according to the Comics Magazine Association of America Comics Code in 1954, in a way to shield child audiences, prohibited comics to display “‘crimes,’ ‘horror,’ and ‘illicit sex relations’” (qtd. in Lambert 45-46). Because of this, comics for adults were

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<sup>2</sup> (Spiegelman, *Art Spiegelman* – Talk 08:08-08:22)

transformed into a “underground comix tradition,” away from mainstream criticism and censorship (Lambert 46). Even with the underground separation, Lambert says these were still considered to have unsophisticated, young adult associations. This strong belief that comics must be clean and child-friendly can be argued as the stem of the graphic novel’s creation.

Because of comics’ juvenile and underground reputation, the graphic novel was introduced. Lambert explains that when comic creators Will Eisner and Jules Friffer began to display more mature topics, “they implicitly rejected... the misperception that comics are suitable only for children, and thereby helped to usher in the age of the graphic novel,” (45). There needed to be a distinction made between comics for the immature and comics for the intellectual, hence the graphic novel. More so, writer Laurence Roth names two uses of the graphic novel (8). One use is rebranding from the comic to the graphic novel to make more money due to its place in the bookstore as opposed to “magazine racks” (Roth 8). I believe this is an issue as the expense perpetuates exclusivity in literature and gatekeeps works from viewers who cannot afford the price of a graphic novel. The second claim is that comics were rebranded graphic novels for young adult audiences with features of “the narrative strategies and character development of literary fiction” (Roth 8). In sum, comic books were rebranded as graphic novels for incentives and to be seen as having more qualities of an established work of literature. These differences only solidified the belief that comics were for children and graphic novels were for adults. While these are superficial differences between the comic and the graphic novel, other scholars do make some more substantial distinctions between the two.

Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, authors of *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (2015), separates the graphic novel from the comic according to four “levels”: form, content, publication format, and production and distribution (19). Under ‘form’, graphic novelists try to add creativity

in areas that were previously lacking, like the presentation of the panels and the presence of a known narrator (Baetens and Frey 19-21). With ‘content’, Baetens and Frey believe the graphic novel is “disposed toward realism” and is “not necessarily restricted to fiction,” unlike the comic (21-23). For example, the graphic novel is more likely of the two to tell a story based on a lived experience. And with the ‘publication format’, graphic novels looked more like a regular novel on the outside while the comic book is more like a magazine, including advertisements among the pages (Baetens and Frey 24-25). Finally, Baetens and Frey claim that the ‘production’ as well as the ‘distribution’ of the graphic novel is different than the comic book where the graphic novel has more of a history with independent publishing (26-28). Although these only show slight differences, with this knowledge the reader may be able to differentiate the graphic novel from the comic without needing to know their history, association, or price tag.

Yet, the graphic novel also has many critics who contest its legitimacy as a serious genre. The majority of differences between the graphic novel and the comic book are seemingly superficial or rhetorical where the former’s leverage seems to solely stand on its name. Graphic novelist Art Spiegelman had said that successful graphic novels, including his own, “were dubbed graphic novels in a bid for social acceptability,” (qtd in Baetens and Frey 12-13). He is making the assumption that the only real difference between the comic book and graphic novel is their name, that their essential qualities are the same. Thus, if the only true difference between a graphic novel and a comic is its classification, what is the point in pretending there is a substantial difference? If the only difference is its name, wouldn’t the same issues with the comic book—being better suited for children—still apply? In theory, if the genre itself cannot be taken seriously, it should not have the responsibility to display serious topics like the Holocaust.

It is because of this struggle with identity, that the graphic novel is an often-misunderstood genre that is confused with children's comics and other facile types of writing. For example, graphic novelist Miriam Katin says, "I was so appalled that someone presented this subject," the Holocaust, "in comic form, I did not even want to touch the book" when she first saw *Maus* ("A Conversation" 240). Before creating her own, she thought the genre was inappropriate for such a serious topic. This is similar to the idea presented by writer Brad Prager that some topics of the Holocaust are off limits (124). He claims that one of the reasons why graphic novelists do not use illustrations of people dying in the gas chambers is because, "any attempt to represent this event would be tasteless" (Prager 124). If an artist is limited in what he or she can show, what is the point of its creation? The graphic novel may never be accepted as an appropriate genre to display the Holocaust or any other traumatic or violent event if the artists feel their creative liberty has regulations.

Despite these differences I would argue that the graphic novel is an important tool to use for memoir writing about generational memory and the Holocaust, starting with its function as what might be called a "palimpsest". The theory of the palimpsest refers to a previous thing—like a set of words—being reused for a new purpose and a new meaning, with the combination of newer words layered upon them ("palimpsest"). Sigmund Freud, when he applied it to memory, described it like a wax writing pad or tablet where the initial impressions remain with the addition of new ones. According to *The Chicago School of Media Theory*, "the mystic writing pad for Freud consists of a wax layer which lies beneath a sheet of wax paper, and a transparent celluloid sheet" ("palimpsest") So, when someone writes on the sheet and removes it from the wax, the sheet will be blank, but the wax layer will still be imprinted. It is like a palimpsest because "it accepts new information on one end, and it produces permanent traces of memory on

the other” (“palimpsest”). Thomas De Quincey relates the physical palimpsest to the brain. De Quincey theorizes every moment and memory of the individual is taken in like the writing on the palimpsest as he writes: “Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before;” however, it has never been destroyed and is merely in the background of one’s mind (qtd. in “palimpsest”). Thus, new details are built on top of older details without the older details fading away.

The creator of a graphic novel can choose to display some of their previous visual memories in the context of their story in the same process of the palimpsest. The generational memoir graphic novel is the visual representation of the palimpsest. It is taking what has happened before— the parents’ experience in the Holocaust— and transforming it into the graphic novel. When this is done, the author inevitably takes moments that they already know and have already visualized and reuses them. For example, Katin discusses in an interview with Samantha Baskind that as a child she had seen her mother rolling a cigarette, thought it was interesting, and included it in her graphic novel with a soldier rolling his own cigarette (“A Conversation” 242). She took the initial memory of her mother and the cigarette and repurposed it for a scene in her novel. Similar to how the palimpsest is a kind of layered memory, the graphic novel memoir repurposes moments creating a layered memory from the stories and experiences of multiple generations. Thus, the generational memoir graphic novel is an interesting depiction of memory because it shows a layered visual and generational memory that is subjective to the creator.

The graphic novel is one of the best ways to display serious topics precisely because of its perceived fault: immaturity. I believe that the initial response that the aesthetics of the graphic novel might be immature or child-like actually make the impact stronger because it delays the reader’s process of analysis. When the intense subject matter is finally processed by the reader

there is a kind of “aha” moment and it becomes that much more impactful than perhaps a narrative approach. When talking about graphic novels displaying “fiction with historical meaning (and vice versa)”, Baetens and Frey say:

It would be a pity, however, to be hammering away at autobiography, testimony, memory, and history when discussing the creative possibilities of the graphic novel, as if the preservation of fiction and imagination would imply some genuflection before the “easiness and escapism” of comics. (24)

What Baetens and Frey are saying is that graphic novels can have the same creative entertainment, which serves as ‘escapism’ like comics do, while still showing more serious topics. There are times that it seems as though the graphic novel is creating an escape from the difficult topics through the creativeness of the illustrations, but the seriousness of the situation appears as the escapism disappears.

Since the graphic novel memoir is re-telling a story of lived events, there is a duality of what happened and what is being illustrated in the story. The viewer can begin to adapt to the artistic recreation of the event and forget the real event it is representing. This buffering of reality provided by the illustrations can be considered a form of escapism from what actually transpired. Once the viewer comes to the realization through their analysis of what the panel is depicting, the impact of what is portrayed is not lost on the viewer. For instance, in my analysis of the graphic novels, there were times that I had forgotten what is being shown had actually occurred. This is because the illustrations are not as explicitly violent as what would have been visually shown through film or witnessing it first-hand. But once one is pulled out of their naivety, viewers like me come to the realization that the novel is just a symbolic representation of actual events. There is a feeling of being blindsided by the truth that only comes when it is presented as

a lesser form than itself. Although the graphic novel has ties to fiction and illustration which has been seen as immature, it still has the ability to impactfully portray serious subjects.

As discussed earlier about Prager, some moments of the Holocaust are too traumatic to show. And while I claim this is limiting to the creator, it is also boundless in what can be represented in place of what is off-limits. For instance, Prager talks about in Joe Kubert's *Yossel: April 19, 1943* (2003) there is an illustration of a rabbi watching what happens in the gas chambers, but there is no illustration of what he sees (124). This is a symbolic way in which the reader can infer what is happening without needing to see it for themselves and still being respectful to the situation. With topics being too sensitive to depict, an illustrator can use their creative liberty that will differentiate their work from another's. If no one is drawing the same scene of those dying in the chambers, it means they are all drawing their own interpretation of the events. This creates more interest for the audience, and it exemplifies why the graphic novel is an adequate mechanism of retelling stories of the Holocaust.

A graphic novel is an acceptable tool of displaying generational memory of Holocaust survivors. This genre displays layers of memory, like a palimpsest, its process of analysis provokes an emotional response that is fitting for the serious subject matter, and the creative liberty of the illustrators can retell a story both respectfully and imaginatively. Calling a work a "graphic novel" opposed to a "comic" is really just a matter of scholarly opinion, but it seems to be agreed upon that graphic novels display more serious subjects than traditional comics. For the purpose of this thesis, the works I analyze will be referred to as 'graphic novels' to maintain the difference between a comic and a graphic novel and also to respect scholars' categorization of the work. While some might argue that there are cons to allowing the graphic novel to retell the

Holocaust, like its presumptuousness and immaturity, I believe the positive benefits outweigh the negative.

*We Are on Our Own* Analysis: Resurfacing Trauma in Adulthood

“First, I must clarify the personal account issue. As I was very young, my real memories of that year are very scant. I am grateful for that.”

-Miriam Katin<sup>3</sup>

In her graphic novel memoir, *We Are on Our Own* (2006), Miriam Katin shows viewers her memory of the Holocaust as a 1.5 generational survivor. Katin depicts herself with her mother fleeing the Nazi rule of their hometown, Budapest, Hungary, by going under the guise of a village woman and her child as they travel through the countryside. Per her mother's, Klara<sup>4</sup>'s, request, she and Katin go by the pseudonyms, Esther and Lisa, respectively<sup>5</sup>. Even though it is based on their story, Katin discloses how she had to take some creative liberties while telling it (*Jewish Survivor* 51:22-51:32). Since Katin was so young at the time, two-years old<sup>6</sup>, her “real memories of that year are very scant,” so the stories she knows of that time have been told by Klara (Katin, “A Conversation” 237). Katin remembers the Holocaust through her adolescent perspective and makes sense of it through her adult perspective, assisted by her mother and her family's written-letter accounts during the war (Katin, *We Are* 125). In this chapter, I aim to show how the 1.5 generation remembers the Holocaust, how traumatic childhood memory is retold as an adult, how the graphic novel aids in the 1.5 generation giving their testimony, and how childhood trauma impacts adulthood.

The graphic novel *We Are on Our Own*, published in 2006, retells the story of Katin and her mother's escape and flee from the Nazi invasion in Budapest in 1944-1945 while incorporating flash-forwards to her life as an adult in New York in the 1960s-70s. Katin starts

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<sup>3</sup> (Katin, “A Conversation” 237).

<sup>4</sup> Katin revealed her mother's name to be Klara in an interview with Nancy Fisher (*Jewish Survivor* 02:17-02:26).

<sup>5</sup> Klara was afraid, “someone might see [the novel], take offense and come after us,” so even other characters names were changed (Katin, *We Are* 127).

<sup>6</sup> While her age is never stated in the novel, I got this information from her interview with Nancy Fisher (*Jewish Survivor* 07:29-07:38).

the story of their flee in 1944, when the Nazis have control over Budapest. Lisa is two-years old and lives with her mother while her father, Károly, is away in the Hungarian army. They're Jewish. After finding out they are being evicted, Esther buys them fake documents to go under disguise as peasants. For the next year, they travel throughout the countryside, find refuge in strangers' houses, and avoid capture. They run into an acquaintance in Borosvár in the spring of 1945. During this time, Károly retraces their steps through the countryside and is reunited with them. Although the family is happy to be reunited, it is clear life will not be easy. While it is the end of the family's time in the Holocaust, it is the beginning of a new chapter in their life.

At the end of the novel, Katin speaks directly to the reader. Katin explains that although she could "imagine" elements of the escape her mother told her, the letters Klara wrote to her husband in 1944 helped her understand what she was like as a child and understand, "the fear and confusion of those times" (*We Are* 125). Next, she writes what the family did after the war, how her father's Atheism and, "the secular education in school," influenced her faith, and how Klara's been affected by the turmoil she's experienced (126-127). For her last panel, she draws a young Lisa looking at a map (128). Katin explains how she would read the map her father used to track them after the war, "but like so many other things" has disappeared (128). The final page shows a photo of Miriam and Klara in 1946—they look just like Katin's drawings (129). These last pages give the readers an insight on how the Holocaust is both a muddled memory and everlasting presence in the family.

Scattered between moments of her flight, Katin draws herself as an adult and mother. These 'flashforwards' start when Lisa is in the hospital after the birth of her son and the last when he is about four-years old (*Katin We Are* 6, 103). She shows panels of Lisa and her son playing with his toys and in the leaves (63). These flashforward also display how the Holocaust

has impacted Lisa into adulthood. In one, she has a phone conversation with her mother talking about the snow (70). Lisa associates the weather to her father skiing, but Klara says, “it reminds me of that day and that village” relating to when they escape the attack from Russian soldiers (70). Lisa has another conversation, but this time with her husband, about sending their son to Hebrew school (84). He wants the son to be with the other Jewish kids; however, Lisa sees it as separating him from other children and insinuates she has lost faith in God. In the final flash-forwards, Lisa reads about the creation to her son from his Bible (101), like her mother did with her (4). When he asks if the story is true, she says it isn’t, but that they’d discuss it more later (101; 103). She puts on his gloves and he runs into the snow. These moments in her adult life mirror the moments in her childhood. The use of the flash-forwards serves to compare multiple generations of Holocaust survivors, in different stages of their lives, and primarily how a child survivor acts as an adult.

In her graphic novel, *Katin* grapples with the issues of adults who are child survivors of the Holocaust, especially the concept of how trauma affects her generation, the 1.5 generation. The 1.5 generation describes the child survivors of the Holocaust and their unique circumstances (Suleiman 277). In 2002, Susan Suleiman examined the idea of the 1.5 generation to the Holocaust in her article “The 1.5 Generation: Thinking About Child Survivors and the Holocaust,” published in *American Imago*. Suleiman explains that an adult at that time could understand what was happening, see what impacts were affecting them, decide what to do, and act accordingly, whereas children did not possess those factors (283). Yet, the ‘1.5 generation’ is merely a blanket term considering the many differences among members of the 1.5 generation. These differences include, but are not limited to, their vast age and cognitive range (283).

However, Suleiman also identifies some collective experiences that they share. Many members did not consider themselves specifically to be a “child survivor” until later in life, when “the consciousness of its members,” began to realize they had all suffered from childhood trauma (286). Suleiman attributes the various testimonies given by the 1.5 generation in perpetuating the studies into finding similarities among the child survivors (291). Thus, through their testimonies, readers see their adult understanding of their childhood memory and emotions (Felman and Laub 1992, Langer 1991, qtd. in Suleiman 291). Suleiman explains that in the works done by 1.5 generation writers, “we see both the child’s helplessness and the adult’s attempt to render that helplessness, retrospectively, in language,” (292). There is no doubt that the adult would be able to better convey their thoughts than their child self, no matter when they experienced the trauma, because of their higher cognitive ability.

Because of their collective quality of having dual perspectives, readers can see how members of the 1.5 generation’s storytelling is reflected by their memory. Suleiman says children under the age of 11 do not have the same level of understanding of what is happening, so their trauma and “subsequent development,” will be affected by how much they’ve absorbed during the event (282). She then poses a question asking how this difference in development will affect their memory, and subsequent story. While Katin isn’t the only child survivor to have written their story, hers is still important to look at because every testimony adds to understanding the generation. For instance, Katin shows scholars how a toddler experiences the Holocaust and how that toddler acts as an adult. By Katin writing *We Are on Our Own*, she is perpetuating the study of the 1.5 generation.

As former child survivors know, the effect of trauma does not stay confined to the moment of the event. In the article, “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of

History,” (1991), theorist Cathy Caruth uses Sigmund Freud’s interpretation of Jewish history in *Moses and Monotheism* to argue how “rethinking of reference” of a traumatic event must first be done through “immediate understanding” and then allowing historical reference to fill in the blanks (182). Caruth explains how Freud retells the exodus of the Jews led by Moses by centering it around a traumatic narrative (185). Freud explains that the Jews repressed their trauma of murdering Moses, and the trauma resurfaced in the later generations through their imposition of Moses’ acts onto “the priest of Yahweh,” (Caruth 184). Essentially, Moses returns through Yahweh, but due to the subjectivity of the re-telling, he becomes more than he was. Freud explains that during the time of the repression of Moses, it can be thought of as the latency of a traumatic event (qtd. in Caruth 186). The example with Moses shows how trauma can resurface after a period of time where there was no expression of trauma.

While Freud uses latency here to discuss the Jewish faith, it can also be applied to other topics. Caruth explains latency as, “the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent,” (186). With the idea of latency in trauma and memory, the victim doesn’t remember the trauma because they never experienced it when it happened to them (187). She asserts that latency “preserves the event,” (187). That is, once the event is remembered, it is open to a subjective re-representation, a re-telling of events, like the Jews did in imposing Moses onto Yahweh and making Yahweh better than Moses.

This idea of repression and latency can also be shown in the 1.5 generation and their testimonies after the Holocaust. With adult survivors, they can talk about their experiences amongst themselves if they choose to. However, it is unlikely they will converse with their children about it while they are young because it is such a traumatic experience. Katin explains that “my mother was always trying to shield me from bad things in life, even bad news, to a

fault,” (“A Conversation” 237). It then makes sense that Klara would not want to discuss the atrocities of their experiences with Katin, and thus suppressing the memory of the Holocaust from Katin’s life. Further suppression is shown when Katin explains that when the Holocaust was brought up, her family used phrases like “‘they were taken away’ ‘gone’ and ‘the war’ and you, you couldn’t press any more than that”— like a repression of what happened (*Jewish Survivor* 56:59-57:10). For Katin, she experiences the Holocaust as a child but writes about it as an adult, so this time in-between experiencing the event and her testimony can be seen as a form of latency.

Caruth’s explanation of latency combined with the consideration of Suleiman’s question, “to what extent such developmental differences also influence the memories and the narratives of survivors who look back after many years and provide oral or written accounts of their childhood?” is the foundation of my analysis of *We Are on Our Own* (282). I ask, how influential is the age at, which the traumatic event was experienced to its retelling? The answer is not so simple, but it is important to understand theories trying to make sense of the delay between the traumatic event and the impact of it. This moment between the child experiencing the event and the adult remembering it can be described similarly to Caruth’s explanation of latency, the time between the traumatic experience and feeling the weight of the trauma (186). This belated reaction is shown through Katin. She says she knew some details of her personal story, “but not the whole story” (Katin, *Jewish Survivor* 49:03-49:05). And although she did face some adverse effects from the Holocaust, like having fears related to the bombings she experienced, they eventually subsided (Katin, “A Conversation” 237). Because Katin was so young making her cognitive memory limited, latency occurred.

However, this changed when her mother began to open up to her about their past. When Katin was about 30, her mother, Klara, began to tell her more details about their escape in Hungary (Katin, *Jewish Survivor* 48:45-48:55). There was an apparent change in Katin because of this. Katin explains that her husband had stated that upon hearing the full story of her and Klara's survival, he noticed how it "changed" her (48:57-48:59). Katin says that with or without her mother's blessing, it became a necessity for her to turn the oral family story into a graphic novel; fortunately, Klara gave Katin her approval (50:53-51:16). Thus, through the resurfacing of their story and memory, Katin was drawn out of her latency once she had felt the effects of their trauma.

The theory that Katin suffered from a form of latency is supported by Suleiman's idea of memory associated with the 1.5 generation. Suleiman explains that age 11, "marks the move from 'latency' to early adolescence" (283). From this perspective, Katin would have to be in the 'latency' phase since she was under 11 years old. Due to much of the memory being repressed both by her age at the event and not talking much about it, it can be argued she was in a latency-like state until she heard the entire story, thus provoking such a strong emotional response. *We Are on Our Own* becomes the product of her knowledge post-latency.

Katin's drawings, the panels in the graphic novel, aid in sharing her memory and help give viewers an insight into how she visualizes memory. In an interview with the USC Shoah Foundation, Katin explains that when she thinks back to her mother when she was a child, she remembers her "sitting by the sewing machine and sewing and sewing and sewing" (*Jewish Survivor* 19:31-19:36). Katin depicts her mother, Esther, sewing in the novel when she finds out she is pregnant after a Nazi soldier coerces her into having sex (*We Are* 78). While Esther is upset in this moment, Lisa, like most two-year-old's, is drawn oblivious to the situation, smiling,

and playing with a doll. Katin represents Esther doing something that, as an adult and looking back, she associates with her mother. However, it is placed in the novel during her discovery that Esther is pregnant—something she might only know the seriousness of as an adult.

This concept of having the same visual memory being re-purposed is similar to the theory of the palimpsest. As mentioned in the “Why the Graphic Novel?” chapter of this thesis, graphic novelists utilize a palimpsest of memory to impose what they remember onto their drawings (“palimpsest”). Katin does it in this scene with Esther at the sewing machine (*We Are* 78). The previous memory that was originally proscribed onto the palimpsest was the childhood memory of seeing Klara at the sewing machine. With the memory showing up in the novel, it shows she’s never lost this memory. Katin re-purposes the innocent memory by placing it in a mature moment. In doing so, Katin highlights the quality of a young child survivor of living in a moment that seems normal, but with maturity has the realization that it is traumatic.

The 1.5 generation processes difficult topics through their child’s understanding. This is shown when Katin draws young Lisa at the end of the novel trying to grasp everything that happened to her through a re-enactment of her toys. This re-enactment begins when Lisa crawls under a table where her toys are lined up (Katin, *We Are* 120). She picks up a ball and swings it over her head before dropping it onto her doll. For the viewer, this resembles the air raids she experiences during the escape (48-49). She hears the bomb making the sound of “Boom! Boom! Crashh” during the raid, and as she’s waving the ball above her head she says, “Booom! Booom! Crash!” (48; 120). The fallen doll on the ground symbolizes the destruction from the air raid as she’s running into a bunker (120; 49). This shows that although children may not understand why destruction is happening, they know it is happening.

The next event Lisa re-enacts, and which shows this kind of child's memory, is the moment Russian soldiers attacked female villagers. Lisa marches another doll in front of her as she thinks, "some bad soldiers came," referring back to the bombardment of Russian soldiers into the vineyard home (Katin, *We Are* 121; 57-58). Katin draws Lisa moving the doll as if it were a long exposure, giving the viewer the idea that there are multiple soldiers (121). A two-year old isn't going to understand what rape is, but through the reactions of others, she can understand that what is happening is bad. This moment displays how a child can identify who the enemy is based on the reactions of the victims around her and will react accordingly.

In addition to destruction and violence, the 1.5 generation also witnessed death at a very young age. During the re-enactment, Lisa picks up a stuffed-dog and thinks, "it was cold there," then lays the dog down and thinks, "so very cold" (Katin, *We Are* 121). This recalls when Esther and Lisa escape the Russian soldiers' pursuit in the snowstorm (62). The Russians end up shooting a dog that Lisa befriends, and the next day, Lisa sees the dead dog on the ground (65;67). The stuffed-dog Katin draws signifies the vineyard's dog. Katin explained in an interview how in reality, she did not know about the dog at the time, but had she did, she would have been distraught ("A Conversation" 237). Katin drawing Lisa gently placing the dog on the ground symbolizes a child processing the death.

In the final scene of the re-enactment, Katin shows how a child may express her anger. Lisa picks up a fork and stabs the same doll that represents the Russian soldiers (Katin, *We Are* 121). Lisa hasn't shown any aggression in the novel, other than a few tantrums, so this expression can be viewed as Lisa releasing her anger. Maybe, the doll is just a tool Lisa can take her feelings out on. It's possible the doll still signifies Russian soldiers, and she is angry that they killed the dog or attacked the villagers. The doll might represent God, and Lisa feels anger

towards His betrayal after she “prayed and... prayed” (119). Or possibly, due to the harsh brush strokes and repeated dark shading<sup>7</sup>, it’s Katin getting her own anger out onto the page. In this panel, the viewers see how children do feel anger during traumatic events. Although adults like to think ‘they’re too young to understand,’ they aren’t too young to feel negative emotions.

These re-enactments serve to process Lisa’s emotions and show how a young child might view destruction, violence, death, or anger. It also relates back to Suleiman about the 1.5 generation re-telling their story: “we see both the child’s helplessness and the adult’s attempt to render that helplessness, retrospectively, in language,” (292). Lisa is a helpless child, and Katin tries to show that trauma can affect a naïve mind. While Katin may not have understood what was happening or even saw the things she depicts Lisa seeing, as an adult she knows what happened. Katin uses the knowledge of herself and of the full story to deduct how a young child would understand and process the trauma she experienced.

Katin utilizes the genre’s medium so she can give clues to not only what but how she remembers events. According to Suleiman, Katin would belong to the “too young to remember” category of the 0- to 3-year-old during the Holocaust (283). Because they are the youngest in the 1.5 generation, they will have the lowest ability to remember what happened to them in the Holocaust (283). Katin admits she has very spotty memory of the event because of her age (“A Conversation” 237). Despite this minimal memory, she does give clues in her drawings of how and what she remembers. When she draws her panels of Budapest, she drew them with a “soft” intention because of her happy association to the city, the city she grew up in and references in the novel as being “a city of lights, culture, and elegance” (Katin, “A Conversation” 241; *We Are* 7). But the panels depicting her fleeing from shooting Russian soldiers are “an almost sketchy way,” because she, “did not feel like rendering them any more,” (Katin, “A Conversation” 241).

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<sup>7</sup> This will be explained later.

Viewers can see the effects of being ‘too young to remember’ and yet bearing the emotional burden one possesses of the Holocaust through Katin’s illustrations.

In addition, Katin’s use of color in the graphic novel is also a telling sign of her visual memory. Bright colors in her adulthood panels compared to the black and white in her childhood panels are not just for the reader’s sake to see the change in timeline. For Katin, the color represents the ‘present’ because she says that “past comes to me as black and white and gray,” (“A Conversation” 240). She explains colors are also used to help items stand out against the black and white, which is why the Nazi flag is in color. Thus, her color choice adds another layer onto her storytelling and these stylistic cues better help the viewer understand Katin’s own memory, as distinct from her mother’s.

The contrast between color is not the only way that Katin shows us the difference between a young Lisa and an adult Lisa. The theme of Katin’s religious identity, as a child and adult, is a telling difference throughout the novel. For instance, Esther tries to teach Lisa about God, and as a result, young Lisa tries to find God everywhere; however, Katin explains, “there is...the anger I feel against the faithful, and my problem was never looking for God, but fighting the established ways of worship” (“A Conversation” 240). This explains adult Lisa’s apprehension about her son’s religious education (Katin, *We Are* 84). But, as a child, Lisa tries to connect the religious teachings her mother gave her to aspects of her life by equating things she thinks is good to ‘God’. For example, during an air raid, Esther, Lisa, and the owners of the vineyard house hide in the wine cellar (Katin, *We Are* 50). The owner remarks, “God’s only truth is inside these barrels,” as he hands a cup of wine to Esther to give to a hysterical Lisa (50). After sipping the wine, her face changes to a happy expression and she thinks, “God is red. God is in

the glass. God is soo sweet. God lives inside the big barreeellsss...” (50). This depicts a young girl trying to comprehend her mother’s religious teachings by applying it in her own life.

To someone who has the capabilities of inductive reasoning, the conclusion of thinking God is wine is off base, but for a young mind who is trying to associate God as good, these may be logical conclusions until they are able to outgrow these assumptions. However, Katin shows that this form of connection has stayed with Lisa into adulthood. During a disagreement about sending their son to Hebrew school, Lisa tells her husband, in regard to their own childhood religious practice, “I prayed and I prayed and then,” she begins to think this next line, “God, he turned out to be residing in a wine barrel,” as she is drawn opening a bottle of wine and with an upset expression (Katin, *We Are* 84). This was drawn to show how her childhood trauma had stayed with her into adulthood. As a child, she finds God in anything she views as good. In adulthood, she is cynical about finding God in a bottle of wine and sees through the façade of religion. Equating God to the bottle of wine is more about escapism into that happy childhood memory instead of achieving happiness in God.

Another device Katin uses is flash-forwards. This is a stylistic choice that shows the viewer the direct influence her childhood has in her adulthood. Katin draws adult Lisa as a mother with a growing child—the viewer sees her son in infancy, as a toddler, and as a young boy. As I mentioned before, the moments she draws with her son relate to moments she had with her mother. In one flash-forward, Lisa wraps her son in warm clothing as he prepares to play in the snow. While she puts on his gloves, she says, “very very cold outside” (Katin, *We Are* 103). This parallels her experience fleeing from Russian soldiers in a snowstorm. Young Lisa was crying, “AAA! I am cold!! AAAAA!!” (72). Katin, in her interview with the USC Shoah Foundation, explained, “things remind me about the war...is it cold, is it hot, the rain...it can all

bring it back, that thing I don't even remember really, of course, but the stories, the reality, all the time" (*Jewish Survivor* 47:37-48:07). In the drawing of Lisa, as she watches her son run outside in the snow, she has her hand to her face, as if she is thinking about something (Katin, *We Are* 103). It is likely that Katin is portraying Lisa's recall of a time when she was cold as they were fleeing from their home. Lisa now makes sure her son is warm in the snow to prevent him from having the same feeling that she has always associated with the war. This is showing how a child survivor will take moments with them into adulthood and it will determine how they act.

The flash-forwards not only serve to show the contrast between Lisa as an adult versus a child nor to just show the contrast between her son's childhood and her own. They also illustrate the difference between Esther and Lisa as time has passed since the event and what cognitive stage they were at during the event. Esther, an adult survivor, will have a clearer memory of what happened, whereas Lisa, a child survivor, may not. Katin points out this difference in memory as she draws a flash-forward of a phone conversation Lisa has with her mother (*We Are* 70). Esther calls Lisa to tell her it's snowing outside. Esther asks her what the snow reminds her of. Lisa says it reminds her of Károly skiing, but Esther says, "it reminds me of that day and that village" (70). She asks if Lisa remembers this, and she doesn't. The next page returns to black and white, signaling the flashback, and the pair are walking through a village, stuck in a snowstorm (71). This scene depicts a big difference between first and the 1.5 generation. Lisa can see the snow and think of a happy memory instead of the Holocaust. Some members of the 1.5 generation have a somewhat 'luxury' of forgetting the trauma they experienced because they were too young.

Miriam Katin's use of aesthetics, stylistic devices, and particular themes in the graphic novel *We Are on Our Own* shows how her "membership" in the 1.5 generation impacts her adult

life. Generational memory is important in this novel because it shows how trauma doesn't go away after the event. *We Are on Our Own* demonstrates how the act of creating this novel is a form of generational memory. It is effective in the ways that it shows us generational memory because it invites the viewer into Katin and Klara's memories. "We are on our own," is said at the end of the novel by Károly when he explains how God is not with them, they have to get back to normal postwar on their own (Katin, *We Are* 118). However, there is irony in the title because Katin is not on her own. I say this because Katin has connected herself to other members of the 1.5 generation through this novel. *We Are on Our Own* has become a part of the collective voice that grows stronger with the publication of each memory text about the Holocaust.

*Maus I & II Analysis: A Traumatic Heritage*

“In a very eerie, peculiar way, the irony in which is not lost on me, we found a common ground and a quiet way to be together, because of, or around, the death camps.”

-Art Spiegelman<sup>8</sup>

Graphic novelist Art Spiegelman tells the story of his Jewish parents' survival of the Holocaust before he was born in *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986) and *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991). In the first part, Artie, the character representing Spiegelman, interviews his father, Vladek, and he talks about his life leading up to being sent to Auschwitz. In part two, Vladek tells Artie about his life in Auschwitz, being released, and reuniting with his wife and Artie's mother, Anja. Both novels incorporate scenes from the 'present' day depicting Artie as an adult interviewing his father. Spiegelman draws the Jews in his story as mice, the Nazis as cats, and other nationalities as other animals<sup>9</sup>.

*Maus* is an example of a Holocaust graphic novel memoir showing the second-generation of survivors, as it is Spiegelman's story. He did not experience the Holocaust first-hand, but he was raised by two people who did. Thus, Spiegelman wrote *Maus* to answer his question, “how on Earth did I get to be on this planet when both my parents were supposed to be dead?” (*Art Spiegelman – Talk 05:06-05:09*). In this chapter, I aim to show how the second-generation remembers an event they did not experience, the importance of images and witnessing to memory and storytelling, and the differences between the first and second-generation of Holocaust survivors.

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<sup>8</sup> (Spiegelman, *Art Spiegelman – Talk 07:52-08:04*).

<sup>9</sup> This choice relates to the quotes Spiegelman includes in the beginning of each book: “‘The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.’ Adolf Hitler” (*Maus I 4*); “‘Mickey Mouse is the most miserable ideal ever revealed...Healthy emotions tell every independent young man and every honorable youth that the dirty and filth-covered vermin, the greatest bacteria carrier in the animal kingdom, cannot be the ideal type of animal....Away with Jewish brutalization of the people! Down with Mickey Mouse! Wear the Swastika Cross!’ –newspaper article, Pomerania, Germany, mid-1930s” (*Maus II 3*).

Siegelman recreates himself as the character Artie interviewing his father, Vladek, with the intention of writing a book about his and Anja's experience in the Holocaust in *Maus I & II*. In the first volume, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*, Vladek discusses the events leading up to their imprisonment in Auschwitz from 1935 to 1944. Before the war, Vladek and Anja live in Sosnowiec, Poland with their son Richieu, who is later killed in a ghetto. Vladek, Anja, and their family are forced to move multiple times, but the couple goes into hiding after their Srodula ghetto becomes too dangerous. They are sent to Auschwitz after being turned in to the gestapo by the people who pretended to get them fake documents to flee to Hungary. Throughout this volume, adult Artie looks for his mother Anja's diaries to get her perspective of the story, but Vladek, his father, confesses that he destroyed them after her suicide.

Scattered throughout the second volume, *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here my Troubles Began*, the viewer sees more of Artie's struggle with creating a story about an event he never experienced, dealing with the success of *Maus I*, and caring for his ailing father. Also, in the second volume, Vladek explains how he survives Auschwitz by doing odd jobs and saving his rations for trading while Anja is in Birkenau. Towards the end of the war, Vladek is transported to two more camps in Germany before being released. Despite a few run-ins with guards, Vladek finds shelter, but after hearing that Anja is alive in Sosnowiec, he reunites with her. At the end of the novel, Vladek tells Artie, "more I don't need to tell you. We were both very happy, and lived happy, happy ever after" (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 136). *Maus I* and *II* represent the hardships of family, trauma, and surviving, making this set a model for second-generation Holocaust literature.

Members of the second-generation, like Spiegelman, often adopt their parent's trauma through the phenomenon of 'postmemory'. In her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing*

*and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Marianne Hirsch discusses the postmemory of second-generation Holocaust survivors and witnesses. Hirsch explains how she settled on the term ‘postmemory’ after noticing the “need for a term” among second-generation artists and authors, like herself, that encapsulates the deep connection they have to their parents’ experiences (3). For instance, Hirsch recalls how, strangely, she could remember moments of her “parents’ wartime lives in great detail” more so than her own experiences (4). She asserts that postmemory is a way to understand, “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (Hirsch 4-5). In the context of survivors, the transfer of the witnessing survivors’ traumatic memories onto the non-witnessing subsequent generations are so impactful that they are like their own memories. Postmemory among the second-generation occurs from being a product of their surroundings. It is only in consequence that being around the trauma of their parents, hearing their stories, and seeing visuals pertaining to the event that the second-generation will have unwillingly inherited their parent’s trauma.

Whereas latency can be but doesn’t have to be applied to the 1.5 generation, postmemory is only about the qualities of the second-generation. Hirsch claims the second-generation of Holocaust witnesses bear “the resonant aftereffects of trauma” through a “transgenerational act of transfer” (3). That is, the act of transfer comes from the parent and goes to the child, and the subject of that transfer is trauma so, the child continues to experience the aftermath of the Holocaust. That means that as a second-generation of survivors are born, so is a second-generation of trauma.

Thus, Spiegelman, the author, as well as his caricature Artie, can be considered to have a postmemory of the Holocaust. Having an understanding but no direct experiential knowledge of the Holocaust was very apparent in Spiegelman's upbringing. For instance, Spiegelman said in his interview with Al Jazeera how, "I'd hear things, I'd hear little bits and snippets, but I'd never been able to frame a meaningful narrative out of it," 'it' being his parents' experience in Holocaust (*Art Spiegelman – Talk* 04:05-04:14). He explains how he would try to listen to his parents' conversations with other survivor friends, but it was to no true avail (03:55-04:13). Instead, he claims "I'd hear stories that had no context...there would just be like these horrifying, intense, nightmare images, but without any place to put them," (03:41-03:53). Spiegelman had to live with only having a mere idea of something that had had a life altering impact on his parents and thus himself. Despite having little knowledge of the Holocaust, it did have an impact in Spiegelman's life. I believe this shows how the Holocaust does not need to be an active force in the child's upbringing, where a lesson is given and memorabilia of the event is shown every day, for postmemory to be applied. Spiegelman, as part of being the second-generation, never witnessed the Holocaust; but, by being surrounded by and having been born to first-generation survivors, he has a strong connection to the Holocaust which is explained through postmemory.

Photographs have the ability to fill in the pieces of a story, like Spiegelman was missing, without needing words. Hirsch sees a connection between photographs and postmemory:

More than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to

see and to touch that past, but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic “take.” (36)

The people in the photographs become immortalized like a memory transitioning into postmemory (37). Subjects of photographs stay frozen in that one second of their lives. But in that second, future generations become knowledgeable of the subjects’ existence, and they are given new life. And when these photographs are of family members, they assist the non-witnessing generations to, “bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation,” in order to have an emotional connection, even if it is painful, to the event they are separated from (Hirsch 38). The memory of the Holocaust is altered and transformed into something else once it becomes the postmemory of the later generations, much like a photo’s context can be changed based on what has happened since that photo was taken. The photos work to strengthen postmemory because they allow the viewer to connect to a time before the second-generation’s birth.

Photographs are shown to play an important role as a way to connect to the past in *Maus*. Here, photographs help their subjects immortalize and give insight to a moment in time the viewer may have never witnessed, like the photos of characters Vladek and Artie’s family, many years after the war. In *Maus II*, Vladek shows Artie photos of family members, many of whom have died in the camps (Spiegelman 114-115). Spiegelman draws individual replicas of the photos Vladek shows Artie, but at the end of the sequence, the drawings of the photos pile on top of each other in a cluster (115). Vladek says with his head down in dismay, “Anja’s parents, the grandparents, her big sister Tosha, little Bibi and our Richieu...all what is left, it’s the photos,” (115). Most of the photos shown were taken before the war, while the subjects were still alive. Now, they only live in that moment that the photographs were taken. Artie seems to be interested

in these photos and asks to take them home (117). Through these photos, Artie can connect that the person in Vladek's story is not just a name, but a family member that might have some resemblance. The importance of family photos to Spiegelman is recognized by their inclusion into his novel and he perpetuates the memory of the subjects.

Not only do photos connect viewers to the past, they provide a story not spoken and facilitate postmemory. For example, when Spiegelman was asked about his brother, Richieu, who had died before he was born and lived as a single photograph in the family home, he said he always knew that his parents had lost a child without needing to be told about it (*Art Spiegelman – Talk* 10:17-10:40). The photo of Richieu was always a mute, looming presence in the Spiegelman household (10:22-10:35). This is shown in the novel when Artie explains how “they didn’t talk about Richieu, but that photo was a kind of reproach” (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 15). They did not have to talk about Richieu to Artie because he could see Richieu for himself. Although Richieu did not live past his childhood, Artie thinks about what their relationship would have been like as adults, if he would help with their dad (15). Just from that one photograph, Artie can connect with a person from a time before he was born thus perpetuating his postmemory. Hirsch even attributes this photo of Richieu, and others Spiegelman includes in *Maus*, as “the inspiration for the idea of postmemory” (13). Spiegelman having a connection to the past just through a photograph shows the importance of photographs to a past life and postmemory. Even if one’s parents do not talk about moments in the Holocaust, photos can replace their silence and fill in holes of memory.

In addition, it’s important to note how postmemory works similarly to the way a palimpsest works with understanding memory. The idea behind the palimpsest with memory is that the brain acts as a palimpsest because it retains memories and brings them back in the future

(“palimpsest”). With postmemory, the trauma of the Holocaust is imposed by the first-generation, and that trauma is brought out again in the second-generation, much like a palimpsest absorbing and resurfacing information.

Spiegelman’s *Maus* shows how a parent’s trauma can reappear in the child’s life, similarly to a palimpsest. Viewers see the struggle the character Artie has with the past’s issues in present time. For example, there were times that he feels bad about not going through hardships like his parents (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 16). This resembles the guilt that Vladek likely had with surviving. Artie’s therapist tells him, “maybe your father needed to show that he was always right—that he could always survive—because he felt guilty about surviving... And he took his guilt out on you,” (44). It is possible that by living with Vladek and experiencing the guilt he had about surviving while others didn’t that Artie would then adopt that trauma and feel guilty about not suffering. These moments show how guilt of the first-generation parent is taken in and imposed on the palimpsest, then is passed down and brought back to and through the son.

Through the aesthetics of the novel, viewers see the guilt Artie inherited through Artie’s struggle with the success of his novel. At the beginning of the chapter “Auschwitz: Time Flies” in *Maus II*, we see a depiction<sup>10</sup> of Artie at his drawing board (Spiegelman 41). He lists the dates of when his parents died, when he started certain parts of the book, when it was published, when he is expecting a baby, and when Hungarian Jews were killed in Auschwitz, as well as discussing the success of *Maus*. Spiegelman utilizes the creative liberty of the graphic novel as he artistically creates this scene. It starts at a close-up of Artie and zooms out with each panel, so by the final panel on the page, the full setting is shown. There are flies circling Artie’s head,

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term ‘depiction’ because Spiegelman draws Artie a bit differently than he has been. In this scene, everyone he draws has an animal mask on that is associated with their identity (*Maus II* 41-47). Artie is drawn as his human self, but his face is covered by a mouse mask. As a more of a human depiction, it appears that this scene is more of Spiegelman’s actual thoughts, but to ‘get in character’ he wears a mouse mask. Forcing himself into the persona of Artie shows another layer of his inner turmoil that he has around making *Maus*.

seemingly to be related to the chapter's title. However, in the final panel of the page, viewers see how underneath his desk and chair is a pile of dead mice. The naked and decaying bodies are disturbing to look at with their mouth agape and lying haphazardly on top of each other. After seeing the bodies, it is easy to come to the realization that the flies are attracted to the dead. Right next to the pile of bodies is a speech bubble from an undrawn character saying "Alright Mr. Spiegelman... We're ready to shoot!..." (41). This insinuates to the reader that maybe Artie is waiting for an interview to start. An interview and being referred to a more respectful 'Mr. Spiegelman', would thus reiterate the success he has. However, its alignment next to the bodies cannot be ignored as it sets up the ignorance the interviewers have in the next panels when they climb on top of the bodies to try to get to Artie (42). The final panel makes Artie look like he's sitting on a throne, as a depressed king not knowing what to do with the weight of his fortunes, but it is made up on the backs of the dead.

The dead bodies under Artie's workstation shows his success is literally and figuratively over the dead. He's slumped over his table and says:

At least fifteen foreign editions are coming out. I've gotten 4 serious offers to turn my book into a T.V. special or movie. (I don't wanna.) In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I've been feeling depressed. (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 41)

Talking about success, then a traumatic event, and finally saying he's feeling depressed shows his apprehension, and possibly even guilt, over the success of *Maus*. Millions of people died in the Holocaust, but he writes a successful book about the atrocity. Much like the flies feasting on the bodies for their own advantage, it seems as though Artie thinks he is no better than the fly, gaining success from the same death. The negative feelings that Artie has surrounding the novel

can be attributed to the imposition of his father's guilt, as his therapist suggests, as well as his own guilt of having success while so many have died (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 44).

While Artie has issues that are attributed to the Holocaust and his parents, it is not the same as his parents' issues. This is another factor with postmemory, as Hirsch explains that people who criticize second-generation authors and members— Hirsch names Gary Weissman, Melvin Bukiet, and Ruth Franklin as a few critics— base it “on an assumption that children of survivors want to equate their suffering with that of their parents, appropriating it for their own identity purposes” (19-20). These critics believe that the second-generation tries to assert that whatever suffering they've faced is the same as their parents, and that this becomes like a personality trait of the children.

Artie shows that the opposite is true. While telling his wife, Françoise, about the qualms he has with creating *Maus*, Artie says:

I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through! ...I guess it's some kind of guilt about having had an easier life than they did. Sigh. I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams.

(Spiegelman, *Maus II* 16)

Artie recognizes that all the pain he has ever suffered was never and will never be the same as his parents'. He feels guilty about this so much so that he wishes he could have gone to Auschwitz so that the issues he has in his life can be justified. I believe this disproves the critics Hirsch talks about because it shows he does not make his woes the same as his parents'. Someone who wants to 'equate' what their parents went through to their own struggles would not think this thus proving Artie cannot be criticized for appropriating his parents' trauma.

Yet, Spiegelman shows moments where the second-generation cannot understand situations of the Holocaust because they were not there. As Vladek tells Artie about how he had to bribe his cousin to help him escape being sent to Auschwitz, Artie wonders why a family member would not do it for free (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 114). Vladek stops him and says, “Hah! You don’t understand...At that time it wasn’t any more families. It was everybody to take care for himself!” (114). Artie cannot comprehend how family could desert family because he has never been in the situation where he had to decide between survival or family. Another moment where this comes up is when Vladek explains how some prisoners “had to jump in the graves while still they were alive” (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 72). Artie responds, “I don’t get it...why didn’t the Jews at least try to resist?” (73). For someone who has not felt the fear and anxiety of trying to survive a place full of death, it makes sense that even if you are about to die you would want to fight back against your oppressors. But Vladek explains, “it wasn’t so easy...they couldn’t believe even what’s in front of their eyes” and that even as they were about to die, the Jews hoped to be saved (73). Artie cannot understand because he never felt the paradox of intense fear and ignorant hope that Vladek has. These moments are important to include because it insinuates a stand that the ‘true’ survivors are the witnesses, the experiencers, of the Holocaust no matter how close other generations are.

Besides understanding another person’s emotions, it is also difficult to convey another person’s visual memory when it was not seen through the artist’s eyes. The struggle is shown in *Maus II* as Artie, the character, confesses to his therapist how he “can’t visualize [Auschwitz] clearly,” while talking about the struggles of writing the book (Spiegelman 46). Spiegelman, the author, believes that the drawings done by prisoners of the camps he used in research were important as he says, “there was no way to visually witness what was happening...the only real

visual witness tended to be people drawing...[the drawings] provided a way to visualize the oxymoron of life inside a death camp” (*Art Spiegelman – Talk 12:13-12:43*). Having visuals from witnesses is invaluable because not only can the viewer see what the camps looked like, but they can understand what life was like. For example, if the witness draws what the tin shop looked like, the viewer can assume the artist had some connection to the tin shop, like maybe it was where they worked. Now not only does the viewer see what it looked like, but now they know it existed in the camps and conclude that people worked there. While a non-witness may never be able to adequately replace a witness’ visual memory, they are able to understand it with what the witnesses have been able to give.

Despite the difficulties of showing a witness’ memory through the lens of a non-witness, Spiegelman shows how he can visually portray Vladek’s visual memory. For example, when Vladek talks about going into hiding in a bunker, he takes the pencil and pad Artie carries and draws a diagram that is then drawn in the book (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 110-111). On the notepad, Vladek draws (and Spiegelman illustrates a copy) the ‘side view’ of the bunker, the false cellar wall and the altered coal bin that allows those hiding to enter and leave the bunker. The notepad drawing is strictly a diagram with labels. On the next page of *Maus I*, Spiegelman brings the bunker to life with his depiction of the event. You see in the image that the Nazi guards are looking through the coal bin, but see only coal, and the search dogs sniff the bin and the false cellar wall, but they cannot actually see Vladek and others in the bunker (111). Spiegelman’s drawing copies the exact layout of Vladek’s example, but just with the Jews, Nazis, and dogs in it. The analytical diagram stands out from Artie’s other artistic visuals<sup>11</sup>, making this moment stand out even more to the viewer. This scene shows how a moment best explained by seeing it

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<sup>11</sup> One out of many examples can be seen in *Maus I* when a Jew tells Vladek and Anja about Germany and the persecution and discrimination of Jews, these instances are drawn out with the Nazi flag in the backdrop where one would usually draw the sky (Spiegelman 33). This gives the Nazi symbol a dominating symbolic effect.

first-hand can be re-told through the graphic novel. Spiegelman replicates a moment he never saw, but it is only the use of Vladek's original depictions that allows for this remake.

*Maus* explores the differences and issues between the second-hand knowledge of an event and being an eyewitness to that event. Vladek makes it clear to Artie that there is a difference between seeing the Holocaust for yourself and only hearing about it. One of Vladek's jobs was to disassemble the gas chambers in Auschwitz as to leave no proof when it was taken over by the Allies<sup>12</sup> (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 69). Vladek tells Artie, "you heard about the gas, but I'm telling you not rumors, but only what really I saw. For this I was an eyewitness" (69). Spiegelman emphasizes 'saw' and 'eyewitness' to show how this is where the importance should be placed. Even if a generational survivor with postmemory knows what happened in the Holocaust, only an eyewitness, like Vladek, has the ability to know about the Holocaust through their own experience witnessing it. Although I think this is a potential flaw among second-generation graphic novels because they aren't using first-hand visual reference, it also exemplifies the creativity needed to create one. In this scene, Spiegelman is still able to illustrate what he is being told. On the next couple of pages, he draws what the gas chambers looked like based on Vladek's descriptions (70-71). While the visual representation between a witness and non-witness won't be the same, this does not mean it cannot be done.

Spiegelman also shows how Vladek witnessing atrocities affects Artie's upbringing. The very first panel Spiegelman draws in his series starts before the table of contents. It is a flashback of his youth in Rego Park New York, 1958 (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 5). Upset that his friends ran off without him, Artie goes to his father who is working outside. Vladek asks him why he is crying, and Artie explains how his friends went off without him—something common in childhood.

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<sup>12</sup> Even the Nazis understood the importance of witnessing atrocities. They wanted to dismember the visual proof of their inhumane crimes because visuals are proof.

Vladek takes it to a much darker level by comparing it to the Holocaust, in a belittling-like way. He responds with “Friends? Your friends?... If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week.....then you could see what it is, friends!...” (6). Vladek insinuates that when real issues arise, Artie will see how no one is a real friend. The betrayal Vladek insinuates comes from his own experience. *Maus I* and *II* show different times where Vladek thought he could trust someone<sup>13</sup>. He also knows what it is really like to be in tight quarters with others, as he is crammed in a train with people for more than a week without any food or water (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 85-88). Many parents give lessons to their children based off their own experiences. With Vladek, his experiences come from the Holocaust.

Another attribute of being a second-generation child is considering things other children may not have had to consider due to their knowledge and postmemory. Hirsch claims that “postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (5). Since someone with postmemory knows they did not experience the Holocaust, remembering the Holocaust is not like a regular recall. Instead, it is remembered through a preoccupation with the idea. While children are known to use their imagination, members of the second-generation’s imagination can be focused on their parents’ experiences in the Holocaust.

This ‘imaginative investment’ Hirsch talks about is shown Artie’s childhood. Artie tells Françoise how, “when I was a kid I used to think about which of my parents I’d let the Nazis take to the ovens if I could only save one of them...” (Spiegelman, *Maus II* 14). This shows how the influence of postmemory is already in effect in childhood. With the ‘imaginative investment’ Artie had, he could create the hypothetical situation where he would have to decide which parent

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<sup>13</sup> When a cousin accepted payment but did not save Vladek’s in-laws (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 115); when a man, who caught Vladek’s hiding spot, he let go only to be turned in by the same man (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 113); when Anja and Vladek go to their former governess’ home for refuge only to be turned away (Spiegelman, *Maus I* 136).

would suffer the fate that many suffered in the Holocaust. The memory of the ovens is imaginative because neither he nor his parents had gone through the ovens. However, if the ovens were talked about as a child, or if he learned of it from other means, he projected it onto a hypothetical he created. Artie also tells Françoise, “I wasn’t obsessed with this stuff... It’s just that sometimes I’d fantasize Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water,” (16). These moments show how children of survivors experiencing postmemory are not like other children in their imaginative process. With these hypotheticals, Artie creates a stronger bond to the Holocaust, adding to his postmemory.

In Art Spiegelman’s *Maus I* and *II*, generational memory is important because it shows how an event, and its trauma, can survive and be passed down through the generations. Spiegelman shows us how the difficulties that his parents faced in the past resurfaced in his own childhood, thus making him experience and think of scenarios other children would not have had to. The effects of this second-generation of trauma is brought into Artie’s adulthood. Ultimately, Artie embodies the cause and effect of trauma his father and deceased mother lived through. *Maus* is one example of how the memory of the Holocaust continues to live, albeit it in a different form, through the postmemory of the descendants of those who suffered so greatly.

Conclusion: Representing the Memory of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

*Holocaust memoirs are most important for those who are creating them. Of course, in the graphic novel form they are still unique. Even the young and serious graphic novel fans pay attention to them.*

-Miriam Katin<sup>14</sup>

In this thesis, I have shown how different generations of Holocaust survivors portray their memories in the graphic novels *We Are on Our Own* by Miriam Katin and *Maus I and II* by Art Spiegelman. I have discussed how the graphic novel is a great tool in showing generational memory of the Holocaust because of the artistic recreation of the event, the processing of emotions needed to analyze the panels, and its unique way it represents memory. With *We Are on Our Own*, we see how a young child who experiences the Holocaust will be affected in her adulthood. In *Maus I and II*, we see how a survivor's child feels the effects of their parents' event despite not experiencing it for themselves.

Through my analysis, I have found some differences and similarities. A difference between these graphic novel memoirs is in the way the Holocaust affects their generations. With Katin's story, we see two versions of young Lisa: the Lisa before the Holocaust and the Lisa after. Because of this, she reflects on her childhood in her adulthood because she has a latent memory that is resurfacing. In *Maus*, Artie was born after the Holocaust and never suffered through it so he only knows of a post-Holocaust world; therefore, we see how the memory of the Holocaust has always been present in his life. While there will be a distinct change that viewers can see of the 1.5 generation, the second-generation has no chance of change because all that they have been given is the effects of their parents' trauma.

Despite those differences, *We Are on Our Own* and *Maus I and II* share qualities that originate from each author having first-generation parents who did not speak of their own stories

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<sup>14</sup> (Katin, "A Conversation" 242)

to their children very often. In *We Are on Our Own*, Katin divulges how her mother wanted her to change their names so that way they wouldn't be tracked down (127). In *Maus I*, Vladek tells Artie how he doesn't think anyone would want to hear his story (Spiegelman 12). The authors show how apprehensive their parents are about telling their stories for their children to turn into graphic novels. This is very telling of the generation that both novels include this. This could be because they have a kind of first-hand experience of the Holocaust that Katin and Spiegelman will never understand. Despite their close proximity to the event, they have the overwhelming benefit over their parents that they cannot recall the Holocaust, what they did to survive, and how it felt to be in constant fear. These novels express to viewers how even if you are as close as you can be to a survivor, only a survivor will know what it is really like to live through Holocaust.

Through this thesis, it has become apparent to me how the graphic novel is a more than adequate tool in presenting someone's memory. These novels provide an opportunity for readers to connect with the setting they see illustrated before them. With illustration, rather than oral history, the person who experienced it is taking the elements they remember the most, the most important to them, and trying to recreate the event as best as they can. They can add their emotion into it by using the drawings: darker shading to reflect something upsetting, color to reflect something happy, or harsh brush strokes to reflect something with urgency. The same can be said with how they write their story. If the font is bold, it is being emphasized; if the font is in all capital letter, it is being yelled; if the font is smaller than the regular words it is being whispered, and the reader can now hear how it is being said. These details are an insight and invites the viewer to not just what they experienced, but how they experienced it.

In addition, I have discussed how the layered nature of the graphic novel memoir (the parent and child layered storytelling and the layered aesthetics of writing and drawing) acts as a

physical representation of a palimpsest of memory—layered impressions of memories. With the theory of the palimpsest, according to Sigmund Freud and Thomas de Quincey, every memory an individual has is layered on top of the previous memory in the human brain (as qtd. in “palimpsest”). So, the individual brings the previous memory with them into every new experience (Dillon qtd. in “palimpsest”). This idea creates the belief that past experiences building on top of each other creates who that individual is. With the graphic novel, the illustrations and writing are layered together to get the full story. The cumulation of the creator’s memory, emotions, and visuals are added into the illustrations and writing thus bringing forward past experiences and emotions into the present drawing, like the palimpsest would. This genre provides the way for authors to creatively tell their story.

The theory behind the palimpsest further emphasizes the generational aspects of *We Are on Our Own* and *Maus I and II*. Like how the palimpsest brings previous experiences into the present, the generational graphic novel memoir brings the parents’ experiences out through their child's story. When their parents told them the stories, they were doing so through their own layered memory of how they remembered the past in the present. Then, when their child retells the story, they are doing so through what they retained from their parents’ narration. Each retelling adds to the story, but still, like the palimpsest, the faint impression of the past’s trauma remains.

These findings are important because it shows that the graphic novel can be used to understand memory, something that may become more difficult to do as time goes on and the Holocaust is farther in the past. Will there be a time where the memory of the Holocaust is too diluted due to the passing of time and continuous creation of generations? Will the generational memory go away entirely? Or will it strengthen with the expansion of descendants? There is a

possibility that we could forget about the Holocaust as did other historical events as time has passed. However, there is evidence that Holocaust generational memory will live on in the graphic novel memoirs, like with Amy Kurzweil's, a third-generational survivor, graphic novel memoir *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir* (2016) ("Flying Couch"). There is a sense of reassurance that descendants of survivors will continue to re-tell their story even as the generations become further and further from the event, but only time will tell as to what extent.

In conclusion, graphic novels offer insight into how moments are remembered throughout the generations. It will be interesting to see how these memories are portrayed as the stories are filtered throughout the third, fourth, fifth, sixth generations and beyond. The reasons that future novels will be written about the Holocaust will most likely vary from author to author. For Katin it was form of expressing the "running narrative in my mind" of her time in the Holocaust (Katin, "A Conversation" 237). For Spiegelman, in addition to the fact that Holocaust literature and studies were non-existent at the time despite the event being prominent in his home, creating his graphic novels were for the purpose of understanding how he exists when neither of his parents were supposed to (Spiegelman, *Art Spiegelman – Talk* 05:02-05:53). The next generations will no doubt have new reasons to write about the Holocaust and above all it will remain important to study how an event is remembered through different media because it shows how we preserve memory. And how we establish our connection to our past helps us understand who we are for the present and the future generations.

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