For over a decade, Professor David Feinberg of the University of Minnesota has spearheaded an artistic project known as Voice to Vision. The mission of Voice to Vision is to document the stories of genocide survivors through visual artworks and video documentaries so that the world can learn of their experiences. For the past nine months, I have had the privilege of working collaboratively with the Voice to Vision team on their eighth project, titled *Born in Darkness*. As a collaborative artist, as well as the project graphic designer, I had the opportunity to explore the survivor stories through artistic experimentation.

*Voice to Vision 8: Born in Darkness* follows the experiences of the Chaouat family, living in occupied France during World War II. The Chaouats were members of the French Resistance and risked their lives day after day in order to resist the Nazi regime. Our first filmed interview was with Sarah Chaouat, who was only a young girl at the time of the conflict. Sarah provided us with stories of her parents and their involvement with the French Resistance. To help tell her story, as well as her parents’, we asked her to help create an artwork that centers on their experiences. Following her first marks on a blank canvas, a collaborative effort took place to finish the piece, responding to Sarah’s artistic direction. Using family photographs, paints, objects, and other materials, months were spent carefully creating an artwork that accurately captured the stories Sarah shared.
The second interview we conducted featured Sarah’s son, Bruno. Bruno Chaouat is an associate professor of French and Italian studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. We asked Bruno to follow the same interview procedure as his mother in order to learn about how the hardships his family has faced has affected him. It was fascinating to see how these events impacted someone from a generation later. Bruno shared with us a chilling detail about how he frequently hears the sound of Nazi boots marching in his head, even though he wasn’t alive yet to hear them during the Nazi invasion. Stories and details like this were shared with us during his interview and were later incorporated into his own artwork for the project.

When Sarah and Bruno were not present, the Voice to Vision team worked collaboratively to finish the artworks that centered on their experiences. Whether it was a brushstroke or a new figure added to the piece, we approached each move as a team and made decisions together. This approach is a signature aspect of Voice to Vision and results in highly diverse and unique works of art. Because the pieces were mixed media, we were able to incorporate Chaouat family photos, figurines, physical materials, and anything else that really spoke to the survivor stories. Sarah had us include a Nazi soldier figurine that stood in the exact position of a soldier from her memory, as well as a small sewing table model that reminded her of her mother’s sewing table used to make Resistance armbands. Sarah unintentionally saved her mother’s life at age 4 by ending a Nazi
inspection of her home with her childish innocence. That scene is depicted in her piece, titled *Born in Darkness*. By incorporating physical symbols like these in the artworks, strong narratives were created within the pieces that truly speak of the stories they represent.

The final part of Sarah and Bruno’s collaboration with us was the creation of a painting by both Sarah and Bruno. The two of them added their own touches to a large canvas using paint. Bruno included a series of triangles that he often finds himself subconsciously doodling. These triangles likely represent the yellow triangles worn by Jews under the Nazi regime. His mother painted a scene from her childhood memory of a Nazi soldier she watched from her window. The painting resulted in a powerful composition of memories between two different minds.

As the graphic designer for the project, I was in charge of all of the digital aspects, including photo editing. This position not only allowed me to create images for use in the physical artworks, but also to create a design for the documentary DVD cover. The cover artwork was just that: an opportunity to make another artwork. It involved a lot of trial and error, trying different compositions and using different images in Photoshop in order to find a design that really spoke to the project. I ended up creating a collage of photos and images that represented Sarah and Bruno’s stories. The cover features an image of Sarah at age four, the age she would have been during the bulk of her exposure to occupied France. It also features images of her parents, the collaborative painting she
created with her son and the train station from her childhood memory. Through several critiques with the Voice to Vision team, I eventually produced a cover that worked.

By the end of my involvement with the project, all of the artworks had been created. The remaining portions of the project are the video editing for the documentary and for the project to be presented publically at a Voice to Vision art show. The project is expected to be completely finished in fall of 2013. My experience with Voice to Vision 8 was exceptional. The stories I heard and the experiences I gained will stay with me forever. Voice to Vision has opened my eyes to the many injustices in the world, both past and present. Through survivor stories, I have learned what it means to stand up for those who are being mistreated and what it means to be courageous. I have also learned valuable lessons about what makes great artworks, which proves invaluable to my growth as an artist. Voice to Vision 8 was an experience I’ll never forget, and I know others will learn from it as well.