

Coming to grips with a nightmare

By JAMI BERNARD

THE Holocaust is so terrible and confusing a piece of modern history that there are even movements afoot to pretend the whole thing never happened. Irene Lilienheim Angelico, the child of death-camp survivors, swims bravely against the current and returns to the site of her parents' nightmare to film a documentary, "Dark Lullabies," which has its New York premiere at the 92nd Street Y

American Jewry film festival beginning Sunday.

Driven to try to understand the Holocaust after reading her father's Dachau diaries, the 35-year-old Angelico journeys back to the scene of the crimes and seeks out the second generation — children, like herself, of survivors, and also the children of perpetrators.

Angelico, like everyone, is asking Why? This modest and highly

personal documentary does not provide the answer, of course, if indeed there is one. As one man says in the film: "How do you respond to it? This question has occupied me for the last 35, 40 years, and I am no closer to an answer."

Nevertheless, Angelico is "trying to understand the experience that separates me from my parents." Often fighting tears and putting herself and her values on the line, this beautiful, al-

most fragile-looking woman interviews Jews and Germans alike. The result is quite poignant.

The plight of the children of survivors has been documented — the guilt, the responsibility, the feelings of isolation. Here, Angelico, mixing in ghostly footage of the concentration camps, seems to find some solace in her interviews by recreating with her peers the extended family that had been wiped out

during the war.

The most interesting parts are the responses of the German second generation. One woman, on discovering that her home is in the shadow of a death camp, admits with shame: "I was never told about [the Holocaust], and that's why I never learned to ask questions about it."

The most chilling scene is when the stalwart Angelico restrains herself enough to interview two young members of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany. When asked if they are familiar with the Holocaust, they smile and laugh, thinking she is referring to the TV mini-series of the same name. The Holocaust, to them, is a piece of TV fiction.

Unfortunately some of the dialogue is muddy. There are no subtitles, and the translation has to ride over the live voices.

Irene Lilienheim Angelico's father's diary later has an entry about her own birth: "In her eyes I see a reflection of my mother, of my sister, of myself."

You will emerge from this film with a renewed spirit of inquiry.

The Y looks at Jews in films

A 10-DAY film festival celebrating the Jewish experience in America opens Sunday at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA.

"American Jewry: Looking at Ourselves" will screen such well-known films as "The Way We Were," "Zelig," "Next Stop, Greenwich Village," and the 1937 "They Shall Not Forget," with Lana Turner and Claude Rains, based on the 1915 lynching of Leo Frank in Marietta, Ga.

Also in the festival: shorts, documentaries, and the New York premiere of four independent films.

Among the New York premieres are "Dark

Lullabies," a documentary about the effect of the Holocaust on the children of survivors (reviewed above), and a funny 15-minute short, "Gefilte Fish," in which three generations of director Karen Silverstein's family prepare the dish in their successively modern ways.

A pass to the festival, which runs through Sept. 16, costs \$40. Admission to a full day of screenings is \$15, while single-screening tickets can be had for \$8. Programs and tickets are available at the 92nd Street Y box office, 1395 Lexington Av.

For further information, call 212-427-6000.



"The Rise and Fall of the Borscht Belt," a documentary in the "American Jewry" film festival at the 92nd Street Y.