

Children of Nazis talk in Dark Lullabies

New film explores how Holocaust was possible

By
JANICE ARNOLD

MONTREAL — For the first 30 years of her life, Irene Angelico (nee Lilienheim) avoided everything to do with the Holocaust. That was fine with her parents, concentration camp survivors, who had made a new life in Montreal and were not interested in burdening their only daughter with the past.

But, as Angelico, director of and central figure in the new documentary film *Dark Lullabies*, says, she was not happy. Like other children of Holocaust survivors, she had absorbed impressions of what her parents had gone through — even though they may have not dealt with the topic directly — which she found too painful to come to terms with.

In 1977, after an initial refusal, she saw the film *Memory of Justice* in which Albert Speer, Hitler's minister of armaments, is interviewed. "That interview gave a jolt to my consciousness from which I never recovered. For the first time, I realized that the people who had created so much suffering and horror were not easily identifiable monsters but human beings that appeared to possess positive

and reasonable qualities," said Angelico.

The questions and confusion that arose from this discovery were the seed for *Dark Lullabies*, which has its premiere during the Montreal World Film Festival (Aug. 29, 11.10 a.m., and Sept. 1, 5 p.m., at the Cinema Parisien).

What lifts this film above a story of one individual's identity crisis is Angelico's interviews with Germans of her age in West Germany who are the children of former Nazis or are, at least, of the post-war generation of Germans.

They range from a uniformed member of the neo-Nazi party who calls the Holocaust an invention of Hollywood to the sensitive Harald Luders, who made the film called *Now, After All These Years* in which he deals with the older generation of Germans' refusal to acknowledge their part in what happened to the Jews.

Luders was the associate director of *Dark Lullabies* and accompanied Angelico during the seven weeks she spent in West Germany. Angelico's co-director and co-editor was another Montrealer Abbey Jack Neidik.

Angelico began working on *Dark Lullabies* five years ago. The 81-minute



Irene Angelico

film was co-produced by Studio D of the National Film Board and Angelico's and Luders' own company DLI Productions.

Major funding for the film was contributed by a group of prominent members of the Montreal Jewish community, led by Charles and Andrea Bronfman, and the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Montreal.

The film was shot in Canada, Israel and West Germany. There is considerable footage from the gatherings of children of Holocaust survivors held at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in 1980 and in Israel the following year.

The film is narrated by Angelico and much of the format consists of Angelico doing interviews with people she hopes will give her

some insight into how the Holocaust could have happened.

Her journey begins with Chaim Rosen, who was a member of the Jewish Brigade and now lives in Montreal, who tells her it is futile to try and find a meaning in what happened.

Nevertheless, she goes ahead with her emotional journey, finding comfort in the knowledge that there are other children of survivors who share her feelings and that many survivors, including her parents, Henry and Lydia Lilienheim, had the strength and hope to rebuild their lives.

An almost poetic manuscript written by her father after his liberation from Dachau, describing both his grief and hope, provides a backdrop for the film. Angelico visits Dachau at exactly the same age as her father was when he was liberated.

The scenes from Israel convey the message that the Jewish state has been a land of redemption for not only Holocaust victims but even there the second generation is trying to come to grips with its legacy.

Early on in her research, Angelico realized that the children of Nazis also live in the shadow of the Holocaust and many of the

things that bothered her could only be dealt with by going to Germany. She had grave personal reservations about including this aspect in the film, and she realized a dialogue with today's Germans is an even more touchy topic for survivors than exploring the effects of the Holocaust on their children.

Finding financial support for the film, she admits, was discouraging. In fact, production lagged for three years because of lack of money. She and Neidik put every cent they had personally into the film.

Studio D, the women's unit of the NFB where Angelico had worked as a researcher since 1974, eventually assumed what represented less than half the budget. She and Neidik approached Alan Rose, executive vice-president of Canadian Jewish Congress, who arranged for a meeting with the Bronfmans, who were impressed enough with the project to provide the backing needed to complete the film.

The Bronfmans, along with the other investors who joined in, said Angelico, gave not only financial support, "but invaluable creative and critical feedback during the final stages of the film."

As it turned out, the Montreal and Israel seg-

ments were filmed on a shoestring but West Germany, the most controversial aspect of the project, was the place where the filmmakers had the most time and money to research and shoot.

"Everyone warned us that we could never find children of Nazis who would agree to be interviewed, much less the wide range of reactions that we knew were necessary to give an honest view of Germany today," Angelico said.

The Germans interviewed include Sigfried Gauch, whose father Herman wrote a basic text on Nazi racial theory, and Antje Mulka, whose grandfather was the vice-commandant of Auschwitz and was sentenced to 14 years in prison for his crimes.

Gauch said his parents never spoke about the past except to claim the stories about camp exterminations were false. He believes the Holocaust happened because of the kind of society that was Germany; one where no one acted independently but rather on orders and therefore assumed no personal responsibility or guilt over "just doing their job."

The Auschwitz commander's granddaughter is confused — like Angelico — over how someone who was so loving

and gentle could have carried out such terror.

Other younger Germans in the film are a woman who says she hates her father, yet she cannot rid herself of the prejudice against Jews he passed on to her. Another woman who publishes and sells a souvenir book on Hitler at a stand near his former home still ignorantly clings to the image of Hitler as a "great man" who only wanted to save the homeland and has been maligned because Germany lost the war.

Yet another woman is deeply disturbed by older Germans' excuse that they did not know what was going on and the fact that there was a camp just outside the town she lived in for many years. The truth she had to learn from people outside her country.

For Angelico, making *Dark Lullabies*, her first feature-length documentary, did not answer her questions because "there aren't answers. What is important is to ask the questions."

Distribution of *Dark Lullabies* is now being negotiated. Both CBC and PBS Television are looking at it, said Angelico. The film's next confirmed showing will be at the Bloor Theatre in Toronto Nov. 3.