

Holocaust film shows two sides of anger, shame

Children of parents who survived the Holocaust have been called "a generation possessed" and for good reason. Although they weren't born until after the Holocaust, their lives have been inextricably entwined in it.

Grandparents and other family members who should have shared their world were killed. Family memorabilia was destroyed. Their parents survived when two out of every three Jews in Europe didn't. Their horrid memories survived as well.

Some of the parents were so determined to build new lives that they tried to shield their offspring from knowledge of their tragic past. But they couldn't. Inevitably, they passed on their experiences through images and impressions. While unspoken, they were bound to have a profound effect on their children.

Montreal filmmaker Irene Li-



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lienheim Angelico is a member of this possessed generation. Born shortly after World War II to parents who were interned in concentration camps, Angelico maintains that while her parents' experience was always a part of her, it also separated her from them.

She had many unanswered questions about the Holocaust: How did it come to happen? Why didn't people do anything to stop it?

In the course of asking these questions, she began to realize that others shared her bewilderment, sorrow and anger. She also realized

that there was another perspective to examine — from the generation of children born to those who had perpetrated this crime.

It took years for Angelico to garner the resources to make *Dark Lullabies*, a film that follows her in her quest to understand the effect of the Holocaust on both German and Jewish children. While private individuals contributed to her project, it wasn't until the National Film Board agreed to support it that Angelico was able to proceed.

Her project took Angelico to Israel for the First World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. Then she went to Germany to meet with her German contemporaries and to visit Dachau — the site of her father's imprisonment.

The journey was Angelico's coming of age.

In Israel, she met other Jews with whom she shared a past, who brought her closer to both her par-

ents and her history. In Germany, she discovered how threatening it was for Germans to examine their past. It made them feel more separate and alienated from each other.

Perhaps most enlightening is an encounter Angelico had with Siegfried Gauch. His father, Herrmann Gauch, wrote *The New Basics Of Racial Theory*, which idealizes blond, blue-eyed Nordics and provided the eventual justification for murdering Jews.

Gauch worked closely with Heinrich Himmler, the Hitler lieutenant who was in charge of the German police, including the Gestapo, and the man responsible for designing the gas ovens.

It must be very painful, indeed, for people like Siegfried Gauch to come to grips with two disparate sides of their parents. They experienced their fathers as loving at home, loyal to friends and dedicat-

ed to the community. Only later did they learn of their role in the mass murder of the Jews.

Siegfried Gauch agrees with Angelico that no one will be able to understand fully or explain the Holocaust. However, he maintains that understanding the political system at the time provides insight into how it happened.

"It was a system where nobody acted independently, but only on orders," he told Angelico. "Where nobody had to take responsibility for what they did, and where everybody was brought up to believe that their deeds never needed to be excused. . . . This bureaucratic assembly-line method of killing people made it possible for them to believe they were just doing their job. And that generation never expressed any feelings of guilt. . . . No one will ever be able to understand that."

Many of these people's children have never had a chance to try to

understand, however. They were raised in ignorance of their past, often brought up with lies. If they learned about the Holocaust at all, they typically found out through strangers visiting the community, searching for clues to their past.

One young woman, whose grandfather was the vice-commandant of Auschwitz, now knows the truth. She says that only by being her own person, independent of her parents' values, and living her life consciously, can she be free of her ancestors' crime.

While there are many things to be learned from *Dark Lullabies*, perhaps the most important one is that our past — no matter how ugly — should not be denied, buried or ignored. Only by confronting it is there any hope of not repeating it.

□ *Dark Lullabies* is being shown in Toronto at 2.30 p.m. Sunday at the Bloor Cinema, Bloor and Bathurst Sts. Admission is free.