

# Surviving after the Holocaust... the legacy of 'Dark Lullabies'

*'This is the last day of my slavery or my life. I am in a concentration camp in Dachau. Will I be a free man tomorrow? I don't know? I am tired of thinking.'*

—excerpt from the diary of Henry Lilienheim, a Holocaust survivor who lives in Glencoe

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The most chilling moments in *Dark Lullabies* aren't of Jews being led into open graves or gas ovens but of Germans denying the Holocaust and claiming that Hitler wasn't really so bad.

A German woman leafs through a picture book she shows to tourists visiting Hitler's vacation home in the Alps. She smiles as though she's looking at a family photo album, then points to a picture of the Fuhrer and his mistress. "Here, he doesn't look like a murderer," she says, and glibly adds, "He was a great man."

Irene Lilienheim Angelico, who made the documentary, wanted to see what impact the Holocaust had not only on the children of survivors but on the children of Nazis who had to live with the burden of their parents' crimes. The Jewish Film Foundation sponsored a screening of the film last week at the Deerbrook Cinema.

AS A CHILD of survivors, Angelico, a Glencoe native, felt she had to understand her past before she could come to terms with her future. "Children of survivors," she said in the film, "are only left with our rage and our unanswered questions." Growing up without grandparents or a family photo album, Angelico realized she was possessed by a past that she knew little about.

After reading her father's memoirs, she traveled to Jerusalem to meet with other children of survivors, then visited the concentration camp in Dachau where her parents were interned. *Dark Lullabies* is a documentary of her travels that mixes chilling footage of the Holocaust with post-war reflections from Angelico's German and Jewish peers.

Angelico, who spent five years making the film, said it is different than most documentaries because it explores what can really be learned from the Holocaust. "There's no point in doing a film that ends in despair," Angelico said during a phone interview. "The film deals with how we live after the Holocaust. The wonderful thing is that it reaches an audience that it hasn't touched directly."

The award-winning documentary showed how significantly post-war attitudes differed.

Rivka Miriam, an Israeli artist, wasn't bitter but strangely at peace when she was told her parents were Holocaust survivors. "People ask me, 'What does this knowledge give you? I answer, 'It gives me a lot of happiness. It's an odd way of answering, but that's

how I really feel. Because of this knowledge I can enjoy life. I feel every minute of my existence."

Though some young Germans denied the Holocaust, others questioned their parents' complicity and made a sincere attempt to come to grips with the past.

ONE YOUNG WOMAN couldn't understand how her grandfather could be so kind and gentle and still have been an officer in the Third Reich.

Another young woman told of a father who was authoritarian and cold: "everything I expected a Nazi soldier to be."

"As a child," she revealed, "I never loved him. I hated him terribly, and he terrified me."

One young man said his father, who was a Nazi soldier, didn't question the morality of his actions because he was conditioned to kill. "The bureaucratic assembly-line method of killing people made them believe they were just doing their job."

Angelico said the children of survivors, at least, have a legacy of pain they can share. "The experience can bring us closer together, whereas in Germany the experience is just the opposite. The children of Nazis can't come together. There's this incredible silence."

One young woman asked her parents about the Holocaust and was told there were concentration camps but the Jews were paid for their work and certainly weren't mistreated.



News/Voice graphic by Suzanne Oetter.

A PANEL, composed of the children of Holocaust survivors and third-generation German college students, discussed the ambivalent attitudes the film explored.

A woman in the audience said she had visited Austria and had asked a teenage girl to tell her what she knew of Hitler. "He was a great man. He got rid of some very bad people" was the young woman's shocking response.

As the son of survivors, Zachary Fainman can't understand how the Germans could have watched in silence as innocent Jews were being exterminated.

"To me it looked like you had a nation of 20 million people who seemed to be blind, deaf and have amnesia," said Fainman, a Northbrook resident.

Denial is the German's way of dealing with unpleasant memories, said Ulrike Weber, who attends Northwestern University. "Germans are aware of the past, but they're very embarrassed. That's why they've found a way to excuse something that is inexcusable," she said.

George Schmund, also a student at Northwestern, said whenever he asked his grandfather questions about the Holocaust... "it was just like a big scandal. He didn't want to answer my questions."

Schmund said if German students were shown documentaries of the Holocaust, then they might have a better understanding of what really happened. He said the material that is

spoon-fed to students in textbooks can't begin to convey the painful legacy of the Holocaust.

"It's just too much to personalize. You just can't comprehend it," agreed Weber.

Schmund said German youths need to be taught to stand up and "not take orders without question." Otherwise, they will be doomed to repeat history.

The lessons of the Holocaust are perhaps the most profound for the children of survivors.

Peggy Shapiro, a Northbrook resident, said she was taught she should always be held accountable for her actions. "It was a difficult lesson for a child, but it was so ingrained. It always made me think — 'If I see someone else in anguish, will I be a by-stander or act to help that person?'"

FAINMAN SAID he was taught to respect life "because where my parents came from life was fragile."

Angelico said the children of survivors have a responsibility to pass on this heritage. "By facing our history, perhaps we can begin to understand the forces that caused the Holocaust to happen. It is time for our parents to rest and for us to take responsibility for our lives."

Lydia Lilienheim feels her daughter Irene's film is a touching monument to Holocaust survivors and their children. "Now," she said softly, "I can die in peace."