

Launch of a book and film on Holocaust by a father and daughter July 15-16

Michael Rabiger

Chicagoland is about to see publishing history made by two of its own, and you can be there. A new and highly praised book, **The Aftermath: A Survivor's Odyssey Through War-Torn Europe** and an award-winning documentary film **Dark Lullabies** - authored by father and daughter respectively - will be launched together on July 15 and 16. Glencoe resident Henry Lilienheim will autograph copies of his book from noon to 3 p.m. on Saturday July 15 at the Glencoe Book Shop, 366 Park Avenue in Glencoe, and at 4 p.m. on Sunday July 16 at Barnes Noble in Old Orchard.

Among other things, *The Aftermath* is a love story concerning Lilienheim's wife Lydia, whose narrative is also included. After escaping the Nazis in their native Poland and then being captured in Lithuania, the two were separated. By the time he reached Dachau Henry had lost most of his family and knew only that Lydia had been transported to Riga. Both miraculously survived but it took him a year of unremitting search to find her. While they were still in Munich, Lilienheim wrote an account of what had happened - beginning with his thoughts of past and present on the eve of liberation of Dachau. **The Aftermath** tells how the couple began remaking their life together while still in Germany, of the farce and turmoil after liberation, and of the birth of their daughter Irene there.

This is an extraordinary tale but it is also superbly poetic literature. Eloquent and without bitterness Lilienheim evokes the surreal life of the camps, the good characters and the luridly bad, the insanity of the casual violence meted out by a system, the impotent rage inside the prisoners, and the fragility of human goodness in the face of systematized evil. This of course is not unfamiliar territory, but what is fresh and forceful is the clarity, the eye for truth that refuses to distort, the grim humor and capacity for ironic perspective that is so much a part of this survivor's reserves. Here is a good and loving man, a man who still believes in human goodness yet who has descended into the darkest abyss of the 20th century. If he makes few judgments he also has many questions for a God in whom, paradoxically, he can no longer believe.

Henry and Lydia's children Irene and Michael, like so many born after World War II in the mood of reconstruction and looking forward, were largely sheltered from detailed knowledge of what had been done to their parents. As they grew up their generation refrained (or was dissuaded) from inquiry, but seem to have waited anyway for the full impact of what they somehow knew at a subconscious level.

As Lilienheim intended, he gave his daughter on her 30th birthday the document he had written when she was born, which is now (in edited form) **The Aftermath**. It was a bombshell that hurled her into a quest for others like herself, for other children of survivors facing the full enormity of their family's suffering. She went to Israel, and finally to Germany. The quest was filmed as **Dark Lullabies** with her husband Abbey Neidik; the result is a collaboratively made documentary as reflexively intelligent, searching, and as vibrant as her father's book. The film was exhibited in the Chicago area in 1988 by the Jewish Film Foundation and is now available video.

In Germany she looked into the lion's mouth, meeting with unsuspecting neo Nazis and also with young Germans who have taken up the torch of history, not in exoneration but in search for the astringency of truth among all the denial of responsibility. Among those whom Neidik and Angelico questioned were the children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators. Some of those they met were wracked by anguish and disillusion with their relatives. They too had been kept from knowledge - but for very different reasons.

The Lilienheims, father and daughter, represent something unique and precious in Jewish perspectives; two generations of a family who look into the Holocaust, both as facts and as spiritual ramifications that overshadow every area of life. The father speaks through literature, the daughter through film, each thinking and feeling at a high level of candor in their respective artforms. Each work is deeply moving and thought-provoking, and each cross-illuminates the other in ways that will be especially valuable for anyone - now and in the future - who is marked by those times. What happened in Nazi Germany was not an aberration somehow foisted on a whole nation by an evil genius as many contemporary Germans would wish to believe. It is the dark side of human nature manifested in the 20th century, a vengeful tribal cruelty since repeated on smaller scales and now in full course in Europe and Africa. Here a father and daughter face the questions that absolutely must be faced, and one sees how irrevocably their personal history and identity have been shaped by European anti-Semitism.

Humankind has a terribly long way to go if we are ever to understand our primitive instincts for hatred and discrimination. We now know that the victims of violence - whether it is delivered personally or institutionalized as in Nazi Germany - are doubly punished, for they internalize some of the guilt and shame that rightfully belong with the perpetrator. We also know that their children cannot be saved from the burden. Historical events, of which barbarity is the most profoundly menacing, reverberates down the generations and must in the future be treated as such. These memorable and complementary brilliantly document this for anyone who cares.