

"Seal of Eternity"

Bernice Eisenstein

The Canadian Forum

Dark Lullabies, a compelling NFB documentary film that explores the impact of the Holocaust on both Jews and Germans born after the war, was first screened at the 1985 world film festival in Montreal. By the time it reached Toronto in November, its reputation was such that a thousand people (an additional 200 had to be turned away) crowded into the Bloor Cinema to see the film and to meet its directors, Irene Lilienheim Angelico and Abbey Jack Neidik.

"Cinema is like an X-ray session where you really see what's inside the director," observed Roman Polanski. In **Dark Lullabies**, it is the courage and integrity of Angelico and Neidik that the audience sees and reacts to. The moral potency of **Dark Lullabies** awakens our sleeping conscience and renders the film unforgettable.

Irene Angelico is a child of Holocaust survivors. Although her parents did not speak to her about their past, "somehow the knowledge was passed on ... I incorporated their experience as my own." When, in later years, Angelico's father gave her a manuscript in which he described his five-year ordeal in a Nazi concentration camp, it ignited in her a driving need to confront the past. "I asked, how could it happen? I asked, why didn't anybody do anything to stop it? I asked, what am I in relation to the child of someone who committed these atrocities?" These questions started Angelico on her search for truth. **Dark Lullabies** is the chronicle of that odyssey.

Angelico had ventured but a few steps when she discovered that she was not alone. Many other children of survivors were, in their 20s and 30s, also searching, "a generation possessed by a history in which we played no part." Angelico attended a conference in Montreal for the children of survivors and journeyed to Israel for the first world gathering of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Finally, after much soul-searching, she decided she had to go back to "the source" - to Germany, where she would seek out some of her German contemporaries, including the children of Nazis.

Angelico's interviews with her Jewish and German contemporaries are probing and relentlessly honest - and, therefore, painful. Says one child of a survivor: "I was wondering how in my own way I could take my mother's number off her left hand and have it put back on my hand." Angelico's contact with Germans is just as wrenching, maybe more so, for we are seeing the world through Angelico's eyes. We experience for ourselves Angelico's rush of confusing, almost hallucinatory emotions. "It was morning when I first arrived in Germany. Soccer fans were going to a game somewhere. Commuters were making their way to work. Every gesture and every stance seemed to take on a significance. Who were these people? Had that older man been a Nazi during the war? I couldn't help thinking that if I'd been here 40 years ago, my train would not have stopped here."

Dark Lullabies is one woman's search for some understanding of what may be, finally, beyond our understanding. But this search, this film, is not an exercise in futility. Perhaps the meaning, the truth, lies in the search itself. **Dark Lullabies** has, as its core, the exploration and affirmation of the deep moral potency of the human heart.