

Films

Filmmakers attempting to produce documentary on archives recovered from the Warsaw Ghetto

Who Will Write Our History? An interview with filmmaker Roberta Grossman

By



MARTIN ZEILIG

From Perek Opoczynski's diary:

"At night, the smuggling is carried out over the roofs of the houses, through narrow holes, through cellars and even through the wall of the Ghetto itself. In short, every possible way...Who knows if

some day a memorial will not be put up in memory of the smuggler, for having risked his life - because, in retrospect, we know that he thus saved a large part of Warsaw's Jews from death by starvation".

From Emanuel Ringelblum's diary (August 26, 1941):
"A conspicuous apathy is apparent towards death which doesn't seem to make an impression/impact anymore. People walk indifferently past corpses. Only rarely does anyone ask in the hospitals about the condition of their relatives... In addition to famine, the typhus epidemic is the most important preoccupation for the Jewish public..."

Zydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy, Warsaw, Poland
Ringelblum Archive, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, Poland

"In April 1943, on the eve of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, 30,000 pages of eye-witness documents were buried by an underground organization known as the Oyneg Shabes," so says streaming text in the short sample video preview of the new feature documentary, *Who Will Write Our History*, by award winning director Roberta Grossman.

"Their goal was to ensure that the truth would survive, even if they did not."

The "Oneg Shabbat" Archive, also known as the Ringelblum Archive, is one of the most impressive and unique projects initiated by the Jews during the Holocaust, historian Dr. Havi Ben-Sasson says on the *Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority* website.

"This underground archive was established and run by historian and community figure Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, with the express purpose of documenting the reality of life under Nazi occupation," he writes.

"Ringelblum recruited people from all points of the political, religious and ideological spectrum of Jewish society, who documented the influence of German occupation on private life and Jewish society in Warsaw and its environs.

"Tragically, only the first two parts of the archive were found after the war. They are preserved in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and constitute one of the most important collections of documentation about the fate of Polish Jewry in the Holocaust."

Who Will Write Our History? is based on the book of the same name by historian Professor Samuel Kassow—"a book referred to as a work of his-



Roberta Grossman

torical rescue and the greatest history book in a generation," notes online information.

"The most important thing is that this is an incredible story of Jewish resistance that very few people in the world know about," Prof. Kassow, the Charles Northam Professor at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, said in a long distance telephone interview.

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Remembering the bombing of the AMIA Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires

WINNIPEG - Saturday, July 18th, 2015 marks the 21st anniversary of the AMIA Bombing - a terrorist attack of the headquarters of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association in Buenos Aires.

Cruel, deliberate, and indiscriminate, the bombing was by far the worst terrorist act in the history of Argentina and the largest Jewish death toll from antisemitic terrorism outside Israel since World War II. A powerful bomb was driven through the front gates of the AMIA building in downtown Buenos Aires. The large, seven-story building was the headquarters of Argentina's Jewish community. At 9:53 a.m. the bomber detonated the bomb, leveling the building and reducing it to rubble. It destroyed adjacent buildings and damaged apartments, shops, and houses around the block.

The toll: 85 murdered; over 300 wounded and the area around the building, the heart of the traditional Jewish neighborhood, resembled a war-torn city. Services were cut, transit rerouted, buildings propped up with beams to avoid collapse. The irony: Jews and non-Jews alike suffered from this cruel act of antisemitic terrorism.

It is widely accepted that Hezbollah masterminded and perpetrated the act of terrorism, as it had, 2 years before, when the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires had been bombed. The investigations into the AMIA atrocity, however, have been mired in controversy and corruption. To add to the horror, Alberto Nisman, the prosecutor who had amassed research and information was found dead hours before he was to make his presentation this past January.

To date, no one has been brought to justice.

The Argentinean Manitoban Association in conjunction with Jewish Federation of Winnipeg, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, B'nai Brith Canada and Congregation Shaarey Zedek will remember the victims of the AMIA terrorist bombing at a special Community-Wide Commemoration Service on Sunday, July 19th at 6:00 p.m. in the Berney Theatre, Asper Jewish Community Campus, 123 Doncaster Street. All three levels of government will be represented.

Everyone is welcome.

21st Annual AMIA Community Commemoration

Remember...

AMIA

21 years since the terrorist bombing of the Jewish Community Centre in Buenos Aires. Justice has not yet been served.

Sunday, July 19, 2015 • 6 pm

Berney Theatre, Asper Jewish Community Campus
123 Doncaster St.

Presented by AMA (Argentinean Manitoban Association), B'nai Brith Canada, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg.



For more information, contact Rhonda Prepes: 204.477.7424 or rprepes@jewishwinnipeg.org

Books

Underground in Berlin

One Jewish woman's fantastic tale of surviving World War II while living in the heart of Nazi Germany

Reviewed by BERNIE BELLAN

When the publisher of this book sent me an invitation to read a copy of *Underground in Berlin*, I jumped at the opportunity. While I have read many accounts of the Holocaust from the point of view of individuals who suffered through that period as victims, either in the camps or in the ghettos to which Jews were confined, I've never read anything remotely similar to this book.

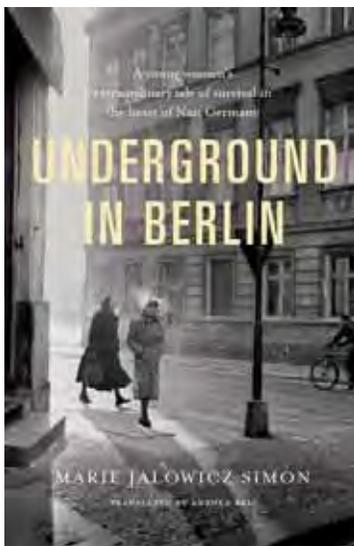
The story of a young woman by the name of Marie Jalowicz (who later became Marie Simon following the war), *Underground in Berlin* is a vivid recounting of what became over three years of avoiding detection by the Nazis by a woman who possessed a remarkable ability to persevere, no matter what the challenge.

The beginning chapter of the book is somewhat deceptive. In that chapter Marie Jalowicz explains how she was willing to debase herself when necessary in order to survive, going so far as to let her body be used by loathsome men, often outright Nazis. Naturally I was under the impression that this woman had survived by totally erasing any normal inhibitions that one might have expected a well educated and highly cultured German Jewess to possess.

But what happens in the opening chapter turns out to be an aberration of sorts. In fact it seems that Marie Jalowicz Simon's son, Hermann, who actually compiled his mother's memoirs, wanted to grab the reader's interest immediately by describing a particularly shocking encounter - but one that actually happened well into his mother's period on the run.

For anyone interested in the history of the Second World War, *Underground in Berlin* also provides vivid insights into the psyches of Germans, some of whom were overtly pro-Nazi, while others were diametrically the opposite. In her matter of fact style of recounting her experiences, Marie Jalowicz does not offer any sweeping general observations about the German people. Everyone she meets has a particular story to tell; and, as is always the case, most individuals are a mass of contradictions.

Thus, pronounced Nazis can show Marie Jalowicz great sympathy, even in the knowledge that she is actually a Jew,



Marie Jalowicz

while ardent Communists who are prepared to risk their own lives to protect her are prone to generalizing about Jews as loathsome capitalists. It may be difficult to envision Germans during that period as normal human beings, but during the course of Marie Jalowicz's repeated encounters with Germans of all stripes, we see how complex individuals are when you take the time to examine them

in minute detail, the way she often did.

If anything though, Marie Jalowicz sells herself short by not analyzing how quite brilliant she was in being able to size people up time and time again. Whom would she know to trust as she wanders from refuge to refuge, never being able to stay in the same place very long - otherwise she would arouse the suspicions of neighbours?

Her story was constantly changing to fit the circumstances. At times she would admit to being fully Jewish; at other times she would say that she was half-Jewish which, despite the notion that has been inscribed into our understanding of German attitudes at that time, was often accepted as a valid rationalization even by outright Nazis. It is noted in the foreword to the book that some 1500 Jews did survive the war in Berlin, all of whom had gone "underground". It is impossible to conceive of that many individuals surviving had there not been a great deal of "looking the other way" by many Germans who had to have known that those were Jews living amongst them.

What is particularly impressive about Marie Jalowicz's incredibly detailed recounting of her wartime experience is that she did not commit anything to paper during the war itself. Her ability to recall even the most minute details, including what she had to eat on a particular day and conversations that she had with an ongoing cast of ever-changing characters is absolutely amazing. (In the afterword to the

Continued on next page.

In Memoriam 18th Tammuz



In loving memory of
DORIS T. MARGOLIS

who passed away
July 21, 1997

16 Days in Tammuz

Though you are greatly missed, the memory of your vibrant and loving presence continues to guide and inspire us.

— Remembered by your children, grand-children, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

In Memoriam



In loving memory of
RACHELLE (SHELLEY) SHORE

who passed away
June 30, 2007

15th day in Tammuz

— Beloved wife, mom, baby, sister and friend.

Your passion for life and your compassion for people live on in everyone you touched.

In Memoriam



In loving memory of our dear father, grandfather, & great-grandfather
MAX TRAVIS

who passed away
July 14, 1979

19 Days in Tammuz, 5739

— Ever remembered and sadly missed by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Roberta Grossman

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with paper and pen as well as with pistols. They wanted to foil the German plans on how the Jews would be remembered. The Germans wanted to be sure that Jews would be remembered in Nazi terms. The Jews knew that with time running out in the ghetto that they had to have time capsules of Jews from Jewish sources, not German sources."

Grossman likens the Oneg Shabbes Archives to the Dead Sea Scrolls "rising from the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto," and yet, few of us even know of its existence.

She first heard about the Archives after reading a review of Dr. Kassow's book.

"Then, I ordered it and read it, and realized it was a masterpiece," she said during a recent telephone interview from her office in Los Angeles.

"I knew nothing about Ringelblum and the Archives. So, I decided to make a film about it."

That was back in 2010.

"It's a very steep hill to climb," emphasized Grossman, whose previous film, *Above and Beyond*, about the Jewish-American pilots who volunteered to fly for Israel in the 1948 War, was shown at the 2015 Winnipeg International Jewish Film Festival, among other places.

"The budget isn't cheap because of travel to other countries, translations of original material, and other costs."

In order to raise public funding, Grossman and the film's executive producer, Nancy Spielberg (who worked with Grossman on *Above and Beyond*), started an online campaign on Indiegogo.

"In the Warsaw Ghetto and in other ghettos, people knew you could fight back

Their goal is to raise \$100,000 (US) by early July. As of June 19 (the date of this writing), \$52,444 had been raised by 414 people in 27 days.

That's 52 percent of the intended goal.

"People can choose to be anonymous or not," said Grossman, mentioning that, so far, donations have come from people in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Brazil, Israel, Puerto Rico, and other countries.

"I would assume they're not all Jewish."

She has already created a five minute-long sample reel of the film.

"I strongly believe that this is the most important story, not-widely-known to a general audience, of the Holocaust," Grossman emphasized.

She added that most scholars feel the archives have been under-utilized because, under the former Communist regime in Poland, the material was (relatively) inaccessible and under-funded, and most of the material was in Polish and Yiddish.

Now, all the material, which is stored at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, is being scanned and made available online at Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (in Washington, D.C.), said Grossman.

For further information on the film, and to contribute to its funding, see the website: <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/who-will-write-our-history-production#/story>

All donations to the project are made to the Katahdin Foundation (501)(c)(3), dba Katahdin Productions, and are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. You will receive a formal tax letter acknowledging your donation.