

Dark memories



by [Byron Toben](#)

Dark Lullabies, dir Irene Angelico and Abbey Neidick

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The Award winning 1986 film, *Dark Lullabies*, winner of five international awards and selected as one of the 50 best documentaries of all time, has had a recent spurt of popularity. Made by Montreal husband and wife team Abbey Jack Neidick and Irene Lilienheim Angelico's DLI Productions, in collaboration with the NFB, it just completed a four night well-attended run at the Cinema du Parc. This was inspired by its out of the blue selection last summer to be the first film to ever be programmed at the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival.

Ms Angelico, a vet of the NFB's famed Studio D (which trained women film makers), is a child of Holocaust survivors. She grew up as a typical North American kid and was fearful of reading more of the horrors of the Holocaust. One day, she finally forced herself to read a manuscript scrawled by her father in 1946, dealing with his liberation by American forces in 1945 and his search for his wife, who, like him, by luck and pluck, had also miraculously survived.

It took Abbey and Irene five years to make this landmark film. It is a search for answers as to how many German officers and administrators could contribute to the horrors of their jobs, while at home they were often pleasant, cultured family men with kind hearts.

The film contains interviews of some children of Nazis. Hannah Arendt's classic phrase "the banality of evil" has some echoes here. More chillingly, Angelico manages to outwardly keep her cool while interviewing some young neo-Nazis who laughingly deny the Holocaust while approving of it.

(I myself had some initial shudders for a moment in 1965 when I crashed the pad of a German acquaintance in Munich — who turned out to be a nephew of general Rommel the "Desert Fox" who, save for a chance British victory at El Alamein, might have sealed the war in Europe for Hitler. However, I then remembered that Rommel later was part of the attempted assassination of der Fuhrer, so my qualms abated.)

Crisp photography and a well chosen musical score enhance this documentary. The juxtaposition of Brahm's beautiful Lullaby (Wiegenlied) against concentration camp deportations heightens the mix of Kultur and Irony. The original masters had become a bit tired and the NFB kindly re-mastered their copy for the recent showing.

Lilienheim's manuscript also ended up as a published book, "The Aftermath," a treasured autographed copy of which I obtained at its launch at the McGill Faculty Club in 1994. Henry, then 85, had come up for that from Chicago, where he was an international patent lawyer. This amazing man also spoke nine languages. In rereading it after the Cinema du Parc showings, I, the famously stoic one, admit to having watery eyes throughout. OK, I cried.

More recently, Abbey and Irene's son, Toben (great name!) has illustrated a comic book adapted from The Aftermath.

All three items, DVD, manuscript book, and comic book are available from www.DLIproductions.ca