Stories from a Jewish Home

Written by Kate Hampel and Melanie Coombs
Directed by Kate Hampel   Produced by Melanie Coombs
Cinematographer Allan Collins   Editor Uri Mizrahi   Sound Recordist Chris Izzard
A Melodrama Pictures production
Developed and produced with the assistance of Film Victoria.
Produced in association with SBS Independent
and financed by the Australian Film Finance Corporation
LONG SHADOWS: Stories from a Jewish Home examines the implications of caring for ageing Survivors of the Holocaust.

SYNOPSIS

The largest population of Holocaust survivors, per capita, outside Israel lives in Melbourne, Australia. These survivors are facing death and isolation for the second time, as they make the traumatic transition to an aged care facility. Dementia, memory loss and physical immobility contribute to a splintering of identity. Removed from their homes, their familiar routines, their families and the outside community, past horrors come flooding back.

Exploring three levels of care from the most independent to the most dependent at Melbourne’s biggest Jewish aged care facility, LONG SHADOWS examines the impact of institutionalisation for three survivors and their spouses.

Harold guides us flamboyantly through this teeming “tower of Babel” that houses up to 600 residents, and through his personal tale of tragedy and love. Evelyne, a child survivor aged 60, must face institutionalisation prematurely when an accident renders her dependent. And life inside the Dementia unit for Alzheimer’s sufferer Dora shows how massive trauma effects sufferers of dementia and the people who love and care for them. All three stories are peppered with humour, delivered with honesty and underscore the importance of love for survival.

LONG SHADOWS: Stories from a Jewish Home examines the implications of caring for ageing Survivors of the Holocaust.

BACKGROUND

“I mean, few people ever leave this place... that’s why it’s a second Holocaust”.

The largest population of Holocaust Survivors per capita outside Israel, live in Melbourne, Australia. ‘Survivors’ have not only survived, but have lost parents, children and or/spouses as a result of Nazi persecution and European pogroms against the Jews during the 30s and the Second World War. Many of these Survivors are the sole remaining members of whole communities.

The largest Jewish aged care facility in Melbourne is Jewishcare (Montefiore Homes), a vast, deeply connected community made up of residents, carers and volunteers. Approximately 95% of its residents are Survivors of the Holocaust.

As Survivors age, their past brings an ominous spectre to the issues of their institutional care. Once deprived of the routines of their everyday lives, which have helped to keep traumas at bay, the horrors of the Survivors’ early lives return. Dementia, memory loss and physical immobility further contribute to a splintering of identity. Past horrors become a lived reality.

Through the stories of several of Montefiore’s residents, their children and their carers, we explore the impact of this pivotal change in their lives. Family relationships, already heightened by the Holocaust, are shaken up as children of Survivors are forced to reconcile the trauma that so radically shaped their parents lives. Horrific memories, often suppressed, emerge as parents struggle to keep the threads of their lives together.

Staff and volunteers, many personally connected to Holocaust atrocities, are faced with difficulties as they attempt to build relationships with the residents and their families. Issues of trust, guilt and insurmountable loss are negotiated through the vast ethnic melting pot that makes up the community at Jewishcare (Montefiore Homes).

LONG SHADOWS examines the implications of caring for ageing Survivors of persecution.
WRITER/DIRECTOR | KATE HAMPEL

Kate’s television credits as writer/director include LONG SHADOWS, a 52 minute documentary for SBS Independent; THE LOVED ONES, a 55 minute documentary for ABC TV; and HEAR NO EVIL, a 26 minute program also for SBS Independent. She has also written, produced and directed several educational programs, music videos, and is currently working in the UK as a freelance TV documentary Director on Who Rules The Roost, a doco series about working parents in crisis.

A first class Honors graduate in Fine Arts (Melbourne University 1992) Kate was awarded a Commonwealth Post-graduate scholarship to complete a Masters Degree in Media Arts (RMIT 1996). Kate is also a recipient of the Queens Trust Young Achievers Award (1995). Since graduation in 1998 Kate has worked on television drama, documentary and current affairs productions developing of her knowledge of film making craft both as a researcher, and a sound technician.

PRODUCER/CO-WRITER | MELANIE COOMBS

Melanie Coombs is the principal of Melodrama Pictures, and has produced the SBS television documentary GROWING OLD DISGRACEFULLY, written and directed by Dominic Bourke; TRAPPED, a 22 minute drama written and directed by Trudy Hellier. More recently Melanie co-wrote the TV documentary LONG SHADOWS: Stories from a Jewish Home, directed by Kate Hampel and produced the 2003 Academy Award winning animation HARVIE KRUMPET, written and animated by acclaimed claymator Adam Elliot.

CINEMATOGRAPHER | ALLAN COLLINS

Allan Collins is an award winning Cinematographer. His credits include the acclaimed feature film BENEATH CLOUDS d: Ivan Sen and the documentaries WHISPERING IN OUR HEARTS d: Mitch Torres, REMEMBERING COUNTRY d: Kate Gillick, APEKATHE d: Steve McGregor and MILERUM d: Robert Crompton. Allan is an Indigenous Australian who is a superb cinematographer who has an extraordinarily sensitive approach to filming - with respect for the subject at the core of his approach.

Allan has shot the following prize winning short dramas ROAD d: Catriona McKenzie DUST d: Ivan Sen, WIND d: Ivan Sen, JOURNEY d: Ivan Sen, YOUR COLOUR MY KIND d: Danielle Maclean and TEARS d: Ivan Sen. Allan has directed the half hour documentaries MISTAKE CREEK, produced for Film Australia and SBS Independent, which was awarded the 2001 Gold Award by the SA/WA branches of the Australian Cinematographers Society and END OF THE CORRUGATED ROAD produced for the ABC. Allan also directed six episodes of MESSAGE STICK for the ABC in 1999.

EDITOR | URI MIZRAHI

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

At first making LONG SHADOWS seemed like a monumental and intimidating task. From the outset I felt humbled by issues of enormous historical, social and psychological importance. I set about reading as much as I could about the Holocaust and its post-traumatic effects on survivors and subsequent generations. I was overwhelmed by the information available on the subject. How was I to tackle a film about aging and the Holocaust when I am not Jewish, two generations removed from WW2, and have lived a privileged life in Australia far from the ravaging effects of war? As it turns out, it was my status as a ‘outsider’ to this world that provided a unique access to explore the impact of older age on survivors of the Holocaust.

Melbourne, Australia, my home city, is home to the largest number of Holocaust survivors per capita outside Israel. Many refugees like them have fled their homelands to find refuge in Australia and continue to do so. Australian society has been shaped by post-war migration, which contributed to the growth and development of this country. Like many countries of the West, Australia now also has an aging population. The crux of this project, exploring the effect of age on survivors of massive trauma, becomes extremely pertinent to Australian society.

Timing was also extremely relevant to this film in another sense. Given the age of many survivors, it was extremely important that someone document how they interpreted their part in one of the most formative ‘events’ of the 20th century while they again faced death, and the trauma associated with age related illnesses.

It became evident the more I researched and spoke to the survivors that I didn’t know and that I would never be able comprehend what they had been through. So I abandoned my attempts to become an ‘expert’ and instead let the survivors involved in LONG SHADOWS convey the information I the way they felt most appropriate to someone of my age and cultural background.

To convey the stories in LONG SHADOWS I chose a character-based authored observational style. To do this I built a relationship with three survivors and their families. Each survivor lives in a different section of the biggest Jewish aged care facility in Melbourne and each has a different level of dependence on the facility ranging from independent to extremely dependent, which highlights the individual powerlessness that institutionalisation often provokes. For these reasons and others it was extremely important that the families and spouses of the participants were happy about their participation in the film. I chose to illustrate this trust through an intimate and conversational style, letting the participants narrate their own stories, without the intrusion of a ‘voice of god’ narrator. We chose camera angles and coverage that kept a respectful distance, only getting closer when invited. Each survivor has their own ‘style’ that had an important influence on the character and delivery of the film.

LONG SHADOWS for me represented the nexus of many topics of enduring interest for me. I have always been fascinated by how history can be told through personal stories, particularly by people who still have history vividly etched out on their behaviour and family relationships. I am intrigued by and hold great respect for the resilience of human beings in overcoming trauma, and how alternative ‘families’ can be formed to compensate for great loss.

These issues have been explored in earlier films of mine. In HEAR NO EVIL I looked at how a heavy metal subculture provided an alternative ‘family’ life for a bunch of kids from the suburbs who lacked family support and faced a bleak future. THE LOVED ONES, about an animal welfare hospital undergoing corporatisation, examined a ‘family’ structure that cobbled together animals and people on the fringes of society.

- Kate Hampel September 2002
REVIEW

This review of the film was written by Harold de Marigny one of the residents of Jewishcare (Montefiore) and a major participant in the film.

Living Shadows
by Harold de Marigny

If ever anyone captured the heart and soul of Montefiore Homes, it sure has to be those two genius film-makers Kate Hampel and Melanie Coombs. They turned what could have been just another documentary on the aged into a fascinating film that keeps you visually and mentally enchanted – and emotionally drained. This is old-age as it really is beyond the walls of a historic building in St. Kilda Road - with nothing spared - warts and all. The onslaught of time and tide. No more, no less.

'Long Shadows' is the truth and nothing but the truth. These are not the fictitious, glamorized 'old folks at home', but real people who are coming to the end of a long and winding road, leaving Long Shadows in their wake...about 600 shadows along the corridors of Montefiore, Ashwood and the Gutnick facility in Caulfield. A kaleidoscope of scenarios focus on the sufferers of Alzheimer's Dementia, physical disabilities, to the more active, making the most of Hostel life. Realities we all must face, sooner or later.

That's what life is all about - a beginning and an end. Couples and individuals from the Nursing Home and the Hostel tell their stories in their own, highly individual way.

In the final analysis of 'Long Shadows', it will be found that Kate Hampel and Melanie Coombs have achieved, and this is no exaggeration, what has won for some of their Hollywood contemporaries the much coveted Oscar... or its local version - the MONTE!

Above all, it also tells of the people who have to live and care for these humans, with the accent on 'care' and 'humane', and 'passion' and 'devotion'. That, after all, is what keeps the 'Long Shadows' alive.
FULL CREDIT LIST

Writer/Director Kate Hampel
Producer/Co-Writer Melanie Coombs
Cinematographer Allan Collins
Editor Uri Mizrahi
Sound Recordist Chris Izzard
Additional Sound Recording Rodney Beuthin, Jock Healy & John Wilkinson
Sound Editing Uri Mizrahi, Tristan Meredith & Peter Walker
Sound Mixer Peter Walker
Director's Assistants Steve Wyld, Talya Chalef
Stills Suzy Wood
Accountant Monika Gehrt
Transcriptions Anne Marie Allan, Maxine Crisfield
Translations Anna Kogan & Robert Brennan, SBS Subtitling
Edit Assistant Donna Cameron
Edit Facility U.R.A. - Blue Rose Editing
Sound Post Soundwaves
Post House AAV Salina Sprague
Telecine Noel Macwhirter
Post Production Script Jo Stewart/Scripts For Export
Completion Guarantor Jenny Woods/Film Finances Inc
Lawyer Shaun Miller/Roth Warren
Insurance Holland Insurance Brokers

Thanks to all the residents and their families including: Harold de Marigny, Robert & Evelyne Westheimer and family, Harry & Dora Gradzanowski and family, Meer Gurevich, Sarah Finklestein, Gillian Plack, Ella Gerber, Pamela Mecoles, Henry & Sandra Kochan, Lili Birman and family, and Danny Segal

Jewish Care staff including: Anna Zvedeniuk, Aviva Feiglin and family, Barbara Freedman, Bruce Salvin, Frida Kleimann, Gwen Hill, Joanne Strauss, Lynette Walton, Malki New, Maria Poci, Pamela Freeman, Rabbi Kluwagnt, Rabbi Mandel, Richard Zimmerman, Rose Pesa, Sandra Keating, Sylvia Kalina, and Tania Abramzom.

Research and Advice: Lyn Brodie, Judy Bell, Shira Star, Ephriam Finch, Michele Bude, Norma Leipnik, Charles German, Alana Rosenbaum, Justin and Anne Bernhaut, Dr Herbert Bower and the Holocaust Memorial Centre.

Support: Margot Hallam, Margaret Harris, Rebecca Parker, Lynne Chapman, Susan Oliver, Nick Russell, Paul Berry, Christie Nieman, Carolyn Court, Monique Schwarz, Charlotte Seymour, Libby Porter, Adam Elliot, Kim Wilson, Linda Johnson, Sue Robertson, Christie Collis and our family and friends.

Music featured:
‘You Can't Cheat a Cheater ’ (Napoleon. Dorsey. Signorelli.)
‘It's a Long Way to Tipperay’ (Jack Judge. Harry Williams)
‘You Are My Sunshine’ (J. Davis. C. Mitchell)
‘Tea For Two’ (Vincent Yoomans. Irving Caesar)
‘Eli Eli’ (David Zahav, Hannah Senesh)
‘Fascination’ (FD Manchetty)
‘Dora’s Favourite Song’ (Dale Cornelius SCORE)
‘Improvisation’ (Arina Galstyan)

Developed and Produced with the assistance of Film Victoria
Produced In Association with SBS Independent - Commissioning Editors John Hughes & Marie Thomas
Financed by Australian Film Finance Corporation

©2002 Australian Film Finance Corporation & Melodrama Pictures Pty Ltd
CONTACT DETAILS:

PRODUCTION COMPANY for INTERNATIONAL SALES:
Melanie Coombs, Producer
Melodrama Pictures, PO Box 347, Level 1, 179 Johnston St, Fitzroy VIC 3065, Australia
Tel: +613 9416 3566 Fax + 613 9417 7336 Email: melodramapictures@bigpond.com

AUSTRALIAN SALES:
Ronin Films, Level 2 Centre Cinema Bld, Bunda St, Canberra City ACT 2601 Australia
Postal address: PO Box 1005, Civic Square, ACT 2608 Australia
Web: www.roninfilms.com.au

SCREENING HISTORY

• BROADCAST on Australian SBS Television on April 26, 2003
• BROADCAST on UK Community Channel on Friday the 24th of September 2004.

FILM FESTIVALS:

• Premiered at the Australian International Documentary Conference January 2003 in Byron Bay.
• Detroit - Detroit Docs International Film Festival, USA, November 7 - 9, 2003
• RiverRun International Film Festival USA 2004
• Rhode Island International Film Festival USA 2004