

Focus on Film

After Auschwitz

Documentary
Holocaust

Sunday, May 12, 2019 @ 4:00 p.m.

Director: Jon Kean. 2018 Poland, USA

Running time: 83 minutes, English

Jon Kean's gripping documentary, *After Auschwitz* follows six female Holocaust survivors after their liberation from Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Kean's previous documentary *Swimming in Auschwitz* focused on the same six female survivors and how they remained hopeful in the face of unimaginable horror. After the survivors were freed and given the advice of "go home" and not knowing if their homes even existed, this film invites the viewer to experience these courageous women's struggle as they try to live a normal life after unspeakable tragedy.

The six women survivors highlighted in the film, Erika Engel Jacoby of Hungary, Linda Sheffer Sherman of Holland, Rena Honigman Drexler and Lili Majzner of Poland, and Eva Scheck Beckmann and Renee Weinfeld Firestone of Czechoslovakia were just 16 to 23 years old when liberated by Allied troops. For these women, the liberation from concentration camps was just the beginning of a life-long struggle for normalcy. After their initial exhilaration of freedom, they soon realize they have nowhere to go. The women eventually make their way to the United

States and ultimately to California. Quickly they reinvent themselves, marry, and try to assimilate into American culture. Many of the women yearn to share their past but are reminded that, "You're in America now, put it behind you." Erika Jacoby laments that not one person asks her, "What happened to you?" What makes this movie fascinating to watch is witnessing how the women grow and interact with contemporary culture while simultaneously dealing with their past. Many of the women thrive in their chosen field. Firestone becomes one of California's top 1960's fashion designers while other survivors become a successful deli owner, a teacher, social worker, and a nanny to a movie star.

Although half of the survivors have recently passed away, Kean's film remains upbeat and inspirational. These powerful and resilient women serve as our guide as we watch their celebratory journey as they build their families and prosper in their careers. *After Auschwitz* serves as a powerful legacy that shows defiance in the Nazis' attempt to annihilate the Jews and their culture.

Reviewed by Gail Fisher

THE LENORE MARWIL
DETROIT JEWISH
FILM FESTIVAL