



Traces of Arnold

A Documentary Film



Documentary Film Proposal
110 min Documentary Feature Film

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A 501(c)3 Not for Profit Organization

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Background

In 1973, 13 year-old Shari Unger stumbled upon a box in the back of a closet. In it, she found a brown leather case, decades old, which had been left by her father, Arnold Unger. One year earlier, Arnold had tragically taken his own life. As Shari opened the case, it revealed a handmade leather-bound album from Nazi Germany, dedicated to her father, and filled with artifacts, photographs and, most strikingly, dozens of colored drawings depicting life and death in the Dachau Concentration Camp, where her father had ended years of imprisonment. At 13, Shari couldn't begin to process the weight and meaning of this album, but now, more than forty years after Arnold's death, Shari realizes that the Dachau Album has haunted her as well, and she is ready to bring it into the light.



Artwork, Michael Porulski

Traces of Arnold documents Shari's search to unravel the mysteries of the Album, the realities of Dachau, and the painful legacy of her father's youth. Through unparalleled visuals of the Album's contents, coupled with interviews, archival footage and Shari's vérité journey, we are brought through a compelling tale of a Jewish boy whose traumatic story links us to Catholic artist Michael Porulski, an American Lieutenant, holocaust survivors, concentration camp liberators, a long lost love and the Vatican. Through this journey, the Album offers traces of Arnold that continue to resonate today, as long as there is intolerance and tyranny in the world.

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Elements

Traces of Arnold makes use of a number of visual and storytelling elements that collectively create a meditation on memory, survival and continuity. These include:

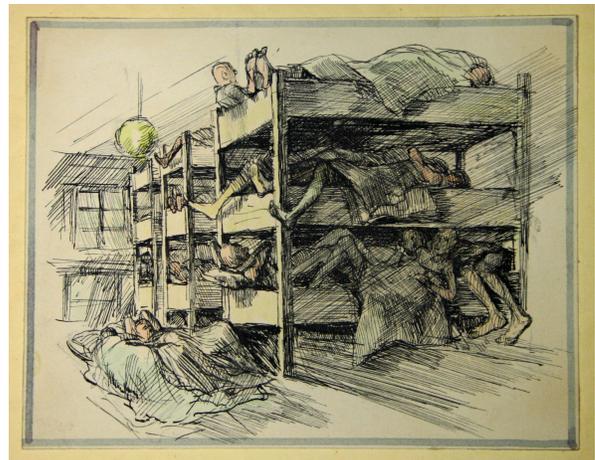
Home movies: Images of a storybook family in 1960's suburban New Jersey fill the frame. We see Arnold with his wife and children and learn of his successful career as an engineer working on the NASA lunar project. We also learn that lurking beneath these images is a haunting memory that is inescapable.

Arnold's personal writing: Arnold kept a journal after liberation in which he poetically describes his deep internal conflicts.

“It was the 21st of July in the year 1942. Being 12 years old I left my city, home, parents and family in the hope that I'd see them shortly. Unfortunately fate directed otherwise.”

The Album's artwork

With thirty pages of pristine ink and watercolor drawings that convey, with knowing detail, the horrors of life in the camp, we are drawn into a visual representation that is unparalleled. These images also provide an opportunity to create a blend of live footage, album artwork and animation, connecting past and present as Shari escorts us through her discoveries.



Album photographs: The Dachau Album also contains hundreds of first-print photographs that include Nazi propaganda, US Army documentation, and personal photos. They portray life and death in the camp, jubilation at liberation, and the resilience of the human spirit in an attempt to recapture some semblance of normal life during the months and years that followed in Dachau.

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Vérité footage of Shari's Journey: As Shari travels to Dachau, the film will utilize the visual elements of her journey, photographs, archival film and the Album's art. Her father's words will also be heard as past and present, collective history and personal family narrative collide.

Artist investigation: Shari travels to the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolson, where we learn that in 1939 Nazi-occupied Warsaw, this Roman Catholic artist had published a satirical cartoon about bread lines. Porulski was arrested and taken to Pawiak Prison in Warsaw, then Auschwitz, Neuengamme, and finally Dachau where he remained until liberation. This discovery eventually leads Shari to the Pope.

The Vatican: Shari has received an invitation for an audience with Pope Francis for May 2015. His presence and sense of universal morality deepens our understanding of the Album. The Pope will show us the importance of vigilance in our young century, one that has seen little or no retreat from violence and genocide.

May 2015 liberation anniversary: This year, survivors and liberators will gather at Dachau to commemorate seventy years of liberation. Shari will share the album's photos and artwork with these witnesses, jogging memory and emotion while giving clues to unidentified people in the photos. We expect these interactions to be very powerful moments of vérité footage and human connection.

Interviews with historians and archivists: The Album is a remarkable treasure of history. Archivists at Dachau decode many of the images. They aid Shari in her search for details about her father and Porulski, and surprises unfold. The archivists reminded us that not only Jews, but Catholic political prisoners, homosexuals, gypsies, and all resisters to Nazi fascism were subjected to the horrors of concentration camps. We are left to reflect on the shared destiny of Arnold, a Jewish boy, and Porulski, a Catholic artist, embodied within the Dachau album.

In and around Dachau: Shari locates the house where Arnold lived upon liberation, the same house that is depicted in the album photos. There, she sits down with a German couple. This is another space for connection; after the trauma of the camp, the house embodies Arnold's passage out of hell.

Interview with Arnold's cousin, Sandy: Sandy shares vivid memories of his young life with Arnold, the bonds they developed, and the dark history Arnold carried with him in the Album. As

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a boy, Sandy remembers sharing a room with Arnold, where the Album was kept in a nightstand between their beds.

Interview with Arnold's girlfriend from Dachau, Sala: Now in her mid 80s, Sala Zylbershtayn looks at photos she has never before seen of her life with Arnold in Dachau. She recounts stories of her time with Arnold in Germany with the bright eyes of a teenager:

“I picked him. He was very intelligent, I thought. I thought he was very handsome. I was in love with him, and he was in love with me, I guess, but in a childish way.”

Triumph

It is a miracle that the Album survived, and yet, it was quite literally Arnold's closeted trauma. The pain that he suffered in secrecy ultimately led to his suicide. Still, Arnold left the Album behind for his children to discover some glimpse of his truth. That was an incredible gift for them. And knowing that they would one day understand may have brought him some peace.

The triumph of the *Traces of Arnold* is two-fold: the Dachau Album, an incredibly important historical artifact has surfaced and Arnold, a haunted survivor of the Holocaust, has traced a line through time to shed a very different light on genocide. Memory is critical to healing a family, *and* to healing the world. Without memory, we are doomed to repeat. Today's world desperately needs a reminder of the brutality of Nazi Europe. This is the power of *Traces of Arnold*.



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