

## World Peace Explored, Through Film and More

by Michelle Trauring

The Artisan Festival International: World Peace Initiative Hamptons begins its three-day event this weekend at the Guild Hall in East Hampton and celebrates diversity through more than 25 film screenings, panel events, fine art exhibitions, dance performances and fashion expos. “It’s about promoting humanity, peace and love,” according to festival founder Princess Angelique Monet, an East Hampton resident. “If each individual can walk away with an understanding of someone else’s culture, other than their own, this is how we can assist in the peace efforts.” ...



Christie Hemm

It is a lack of education that has led to bigotry, intolerance and discrimination around the world, according to “Forget Us Not” filmmaker Heather Connell. The most infamous and extreme case being the annihilation of 6 million Jews at more than 1,500 concentration camps across Europe during the Holocaust.

But the death count was actually 11 million people during the World War II genocide, she reported, 5 million of whom were not Jewish, which is the subject matter of her documentary that will close the festival on Sunday at Guild Hall.

Ms. Connell did the math for the first time in the 1990s, after stumbling across a classification chart inside the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. She recognized the yellow star and inverted yellow triangle immediately, she said, but didn’t know what any of the other colored triangles meant.

When she found out, she was shocked and embarrassed.

Political prisoners were marked with red. Criminals were marked with green. “Asocials,” including Roma (gypsies), nonconformists, vagrants and other groups, were marked with black or brown, Jehovah’s Witnesses were marked with purple. And homosexuals were marked with pink.

“There was a personal note in there for me. I do in fact, have a pink triangle tattooed on me,” Ms. Connell, who is a lesbian, explained last week from her home in California. “The pink triangle is a symbol in the gay community – and it’s a positive one. I had no idea it originated in the concentration camps.”

It struck her hard, she said, as did the persecution and subsequent death of the non-Jewish victims.

“I knew I had to tell these stories,” she said. “If I didn’t tell the stories of these survivors now, they were going to die with them.”

The research process began in 2009, followed by interviews with four survivors. She found Robert Wagemann in New Jersey. He was born with a disability and nearly euthanized for being “imperfect” until his mother sneaked him out of the hospital. He spent the war in hiding with his parents, who were Jehovah’s Witnesses.

And Natalia Orloff, a Ukraine child who marched with her family to the Polish border before being put on a train and sent to a work camp. She came to Ms. Connell through her mother – who had sat next to the Holocaust survivor in her Massachusetts choir group for years and never knew her story.

For the remaining two interviews, Ms. Connell had to travel a little farther from home.

In Virginia, she found Vera Young, who was a Polish



Theresa Kennedy

Catholic teen separated from the rest of her family and sent to a concentration camp, where she sewed uniforms for her Nazi captors before being sent on a 900-mile death march.

She talked about how, at one point, they shoved them all in a barn supposedly to sleep,” Ms Connell said. “And then, somebody lit the barn on fire. They all ran, screaming and stampeding out of the barn. You just don’t really know how to react sometimes. It’s so beyond your level of experience.”

During a visit to Vienna, Ms. Connell found herself sitting across from Ceija Stojka, a Roma girl who saw four concentration camps. The first was Auschwitz, where she received her tattoo. The next was Birkenau, where her brother died. The third was Ravensbruck, a labor camp for women where she and her mother were brutalized by a sadistic guard. And the last was Bergen-Belsen.

“She takes a drag of her cigarette and says, ‘Here is where the real misery begins,’” Ms. Connell said. “I didn’t even know what to say. We’re exhausted, we’re crying, we feel like our hearts have been ripped out after hearing about the horrors she had been through. To have her say that, I dreaded to hear what was coming. What could possibly get worse at that point?”

It did get worse, the filmmaker said, and Ms. Stojka related it all very matter-of-factly.

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*“Forget Us Not” was the closing film for the festival and was awarded the World Peace Relations Award as well as an award for Best Narrator (Ron Perlman). For more information, visit [afiworldpeaceinitiative.org](http://afiworldpeaceinitiative.org).*

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