

LAND OF DILEMMAS: WOULD YOU RISK YOUR LIFE TO SAVE YOUR ENEMY?

By Morgan Williams, Publisher and Editor, Action Ukraine Report (AUR)
Washington, D.C., Sunday, February 22, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - "Land of Dilemmas," a feature length documentary by filmmakers Olha Onyshko and Sarah Farhat, is currently in production. The film features the recollections of four World War II survivors of different ethnic and religious backgrounds: Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian. The release of the documentary film is projected for the fall of 2009.

This documentary film explores the survivors choices and attempts to answer why some people risk everything to save the lives not only of strangers, but also members of an ethnic or religious group perceived to be their enemy. Would you risk your life to save your enemy?

The film began in 2006, when Olha Onyshko went back to her hometown in Western Ukraine. With a digital camcorder in hand, and an interest in hearing people's stories, she discovered that 87 percent of the 850,000 people who occupied her hometown were completely wiped out during the Nazi and Soviet occupation between 1939 and 1947.

The fate of the rest of that region, known as Galicia, was not much different. From the beginning of the century onwards, Galicia's population was approximately composed of three major ethnic groups: Poles, Jews and Ukrainians.

NAZI GERMANY AND THE SOVIET UNION

During World War II, thousands of people from these groups were manipulated by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which resulted in the instigation of ethnic and religious crimes. Entire villages and towns were destroyed and thousands of people from all sides were massacred because of their faith or ethnic background.

Today, more than 60 years later, the memories are still vivid and the pain very deep. Many of these ethnic groups refuse to discuss what happened during this period, and as a result, many stereotypes continue to emerge or are present in today's society.

Olha felt it was time to do more to bring change. It was time to engage in a constructive dialogue and reach out to these communities to initiate healing and reconciliation. In one interview, renowned historian Norman Davies asserted: "In that particular part of the world, no one suffered more and no one suffered less. Everyone suffered the same."

In the summer of 2008, Olha and Sarah went back to Ukraine and Poland to continue filming these communities and their stories.

For these two filmmakers, the film represents more than just a specific ethnic and religious conflict. It is an exploration into why certain people risk their lives to reach out and help individuals or groups considered their “enemies.” It is also an intimate look into understanding how compassion and heroism emerge in the face of oppression and prejudice.

Olha and Sarah believe that history should always be remembered in order for it to never to be repeated. This film will remind us that even under the worst circumstances, human beings are fundamentally the same regardless of race, ethnicity or religion (www.landofdilemmas.org)

THE STORIES -----

AHARON

Aharon was six years old when his Jewish family understood survival meant hiding from the Nazis who had entered their village. His mother decided to ask Yulia, their Ukrainian neighbor, to hide them in her basement even though Yulia's own son was a Nazi policeman. Aharon remembers how his family spent 22 months in Yulia's basement. Once they got out, they showed their gratitude by agreeing to help the person they hated the most.

OLHA

Olha was a young mother who went into the Ukrainian insurgent army to fight both the Soviet and German occupation with two infants on her hands. After many extraordinary adventures, she was eventually caught and sentenced to spend 25 years in the worst political prison in the Soviet Union. She tells her story, how she got into the resistance, how she lost everything and was separated from her children, and how a KGB officer in prison eventually helped her to get her children back.

SUZANNA

Suzanna lives today in the parish of a Polish priest who has taken upon himself to restore Ukrainian churches that were destroyed during the Ukrainian-Polish conflicts. At first sight, she may look like a typical grandmother. As she casually prepares coffee and puts cookies on the table, she talks about how she held arms to defend her village, how she fought Germans, Soviets and Ukrainians and how she was eventually saved by a Ukrainian man.

THE FILMMAKERS -----

OLHA ONYSHKO

Olha Onyshko has fifteen years of relevant experience implementing

communications programs, producing creative content, and broadcasting. She has worked for non-profit organizations, political think tanks, TV and Radio stations, corporations and international development agencies.

She is currently pursuing an MFA in Film and Electronic Media at American University in Washington D.C. She has completed and worked on several documentary and narrative films. Her short documentary "Where Do the Children Play" has won a Telly Award.

SARAH FARHAT

Sarah Farhat has been involved in filmmaking for the past six years. She has directed and produced five short films between documentary and fiction. Several of those films have broadcast on local and regional Arab Television networks.

She has also worked as a freelance editor and cinematographer on many independent projects. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Film and Electronic Media at American University in Washington D.C. where she was awarded a Hall of Nations Fellowship.

PRODUCTION STATUS

The film has been in production since 2006. In the spring of 2007, a video installation with the same theme was created. It received critical acclaim and won the award for Best Installation at the 2007 Visions Festival in Washington, D.C. It was screened at film festivals, art exhibits and community events in Washington DC, New York, Philadelphia and Lviv, Ukraine.

In the summer of 2008, Olha and Sarah traveled to Ukraine and Poland where they filmed more than 150 hours of interview and actuality footage. The filmmakers are currently editing the available material and also fund-raising in order to cover the costs of post-production and distribution. The release of the documentary film is projected for the fall of 2009.

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

The U.S.-Ukraine Foundation (USUF), Washington, D.C., (www.usukraine.org) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1991 to facilitate democratic development, encourage free market reform, and enhance human rights in Ukraine. USUF is providing fiscal sponsorship to the program and is collecting donations for the program.

BUDGET

So far the filmmakers have been able to raise and invest 190,000 USD. In order to cover post production and distribution costs, another 100,000 USD need to be raised. A detailed budget is available upon request.

PARTNERS

The filmmakers would like to thank all the individuals and organizations for their financial donations, in-kind contributions, consultations and volunteering. Because of this collective effort, the world will have the opportunity to witness these amazing stories. They are very happy that the community built around this project is still growing every day. They would love for you to be part of it!

Some of the organizations who have provided support for the documentary program include the: U.S.-Ukraine Foundation (www.usukraine.org), DAAR Foundation (<http://www.daarfoundation.org>), U.S.-Ukraine Business Council (www.usubc.org), Lviv City Administration, American University, Kino Film Project, Security Service of Ukraine, Happy Camp, Museum of Political Prisoners - Ternopil, Lviv City Archive, State Archive of Lviv Oblast, and the Liberation Movement Research Center-Lviv and Tkuma.

Support from individuals have included: Yaroslav Onyshko, Darrin Hartzler, Yurko Dudam, Yuri and Inna Deychakiwsky, Andrej Sadovyy, Vadim Rzhatkevich, Mark Aguirre, Julia Ames, Patricia Aufderheide, Rob Benica, Oleh Bereziuk, Natasha and Michael Bleyzer, Inci Bowman, Mapi Buitano, Maggie Burnette Stogner, Regan Carver, Carl Cordell, Maria and John Corso, Petro Didula, Heather Danskin, Magdalena Dembinska, Serge El Helou, Larry Engel, Pamela Fernandez, Garry Griffin, Svetlana Herus, Leena Jayaswal, Karin Jue, Yuriy Karnaphel, Laura Klos Sokol, and Marina Kokuba.

Individual support has also been received from: Mykchaylo Komarnytsky, Andrew Kotliar, Christina Kotlar, John Kubinieć, Irena and Vasyl Latsanych, Vitaliy Leskiv, Yevhen Lunyo, Andriy Maksymovytch, Lydia Martynec, Larissa Shevchuk Matthews, Petro Mavko, Ihor Oleshchuk, Orysia Oleksyn, Bohdan Pechenyak, Valentina Podgornaya, Irena Podoliak, Yehven Ravski, Marzena Shemaly, Andriy Shutkak, Ustyna Soroka, Motria Spolsky, Stanislav Stempen, Halya Tereschuk, Lydia Tomkiw, Motria Tomkiw, Jim Tretick, Dennis Vaclavskyi, Oleg Voloshyn, Sergej Volvatch, Waclaw Wierzbieniel, Morgan Williams, and Lidiya Zubyt'ska.

TAKE ACTION: Seven ways you can help

If you believe in the ideals the filmmakers are trying to promote with this documentary film. If you feel that those incredible stories should not be left unheard here are seven ways you can help and become an important part of a broad community of organizations and individuals supporting this work:

1. DONATE: Make a tax-deductible donation to the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation (USUF). You may donate online by going to the website www.landofdilemmas.org to make your contribution online. When making a

donation, please put FILM PROJECT in the space that says NAME OF SPECIFIC PROGRAM. Please donate now!

You can also mail your check directly to the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation (USUF) at 1701 K Street NW, Suite 903, Washington, D.C. 20006, USA; specifically mentioning FILM PROJECT on the check. Please include your name and address and a receipt will be mailed to you. Please donate now!

2. VOLUNTEER: Help to translate from Ukrainian, Russian or Polish into English one of the many incredible stories that have been captured on tape.

3. ORGANIZE: Fund-raise an event, party or reception to help generate the funds necessary to complete the movie.

4. REFER: Refer the two filmmakers to individuals/organizations that might have the commitment and the financial means to back up this important endeavor.

5. SHARE YOUR STORIES: Share with the filmmakers your related stories or those of your family.

6. CONTACT THE FILMMAKERS: The filmmakers would love to hear your suggestions or comments. E-mail: lanofdilemmas@gmail.com

7. READ & PARTICIPATE IN THEIR BLOG: The blog is one of several tools that will be used to build a community around the film and allow people to engage in a dialogue around the issues raised. It will also be used by the filmmakers as a platform while they are filming in Ukraine and Poland in order to share stories of the road and provide updates about the progress of the film. The blog can be found on the website, www.landofdilemmas.org.
