

A DOCUMENTARY FILM
BY TALI TILLER

MY TWO POLISH LOVES

The ghosts of the past are the stories of the future



DIRECTOR TALI TILLER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MAGDA WYSTUB EDITOR EVELYN RACK
ADDITIONAL CAMERA ALMUT WETZSTEIN AND SUSANNE DZEIK SOUND HILKOAHLRICH
COMPOSER KIM DRESEL FUND MAECENIA FRANKFURT FOUNDATION ©TALI TILLER_2016

FILM INFO

MY TWO POLISH LOVES

Director – Tali Tiller

CONTACT INFO:

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

shooting format – digital, HD

aspect ratio - 16x9

sound format - stereo

running time - 50:08 min

language – English, Polish, Hebrew

subtitles – English

CREDIT LIST:

Director/Producer
Tali Tiller

Music Recording
Vitaliano Zurlo

Concept
Tali Tiller
Magda Wystub

Hebrew Translation
Aviv Maoz

Director of Photography
Magda Wystub

Fundraising
Inna Michaeli

Additional
Camerawomen
Almut Wetzstein
Susanne Dzeik

Graphics
Yael Rosen
Leyla Sehar-Madauß

Editor
Evelyn Rack

Press Kit Editor
Amanda Russello

Sound Editing
Hilko Ahlrichs

Composer
Kim Dresel

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SYNOPSIS

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SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Tali embarks on an intimate journey to Lodz, Poland, to retrace her personal roots and collective history. At the centre are her two Polish loves: her expatriate lover Magda, who begins filming the trip, and her late grandmother Silvia, a Holocaust survivor whose voice and memories accompany the couple on their quest. As they wander the streets of Lodz looking for long-forgotten street names, visit the ghetto where Silvia spent her youth, and search for a nearly buried tombstone, Tali and Magda discover surprising similarities in their shared Polish heritage. The documentary explores how memories of the Holocaust and war are lived, narrated and passed down by women from generation to generation. It also asks: Will future generations be interested in the history of the Holocaust if there are no longer any direct witnesses? How important is physical memory? And what is the role of the third generation?

LONG SYNOPSIS:

Tali sets out on her journey to Lodz with her Polish-German lover Magda. Their roadmap consists of bits and pieces of old information about street names, homes and tombstones related to Tali's grandmother, a Holocaust survivor from Lodz. Grandma's home in the ghetto, the streets of her youth: are they still there? Can Tali and Magda find them? How would it feel to discover an old house, knowing so many stories about its past?

My Two Polish Loves explores these themes through Tali's journey with her lover Magda. Two women from different worlds. In their intimacy and openness they begin discovering similarities in their lives that had initially been indiscernible. Such is their connection to their Polish heritage. This intimate space stretches from their romantic relationship to Tali's grandmother's past and back to the present again. It encompasses all the questions that have arisen for Tali since her grandmother's death and since falling in love with Magda: Will future generations be at all interested in the history of the Holocaust if there are no longer any living witnesses? How important are the physical memories, the names, the homes and the graves for our rapidly changing society? What is the role of the so-called third generation, the grandchildren of those who survived or witnessed the Holocaust? How does our past inform our complex and conflicting histories and identities, or who we are today? The film asks these questions in an honest, authentic and often humorous way.

This is an unusual documentary and an artistic discussion of how the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors deal with emotional memory. How can the third generation keep alive the memories of their deceased grandparents? Is there still a place for these fading memories in our rapidly changing world?

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DIRECTOR'S COMMENT:

My Two Polish Loves embodies a new artistic and cinematic approach to Holocaust memory, one that focuses on future generations with a deep commitment to building an ethical relationship with the past. It strives to avoid "the problems of traumatization and commodification" that mark earlier Holocaust film and commercial cinema. Retracing and reviving memories through family and intimate connections, the film deviates from traditional narratives of remembrance. It gently touches upon everyday life of the third generation, exploring who we are, our cultural, national, gender and sexual identities, and our connections to our roots, our families, ourselves and our societies. It centres on women and relationships between women: a grandmother-granddaughter relationship and a romantic relationship. Women are both in front of and behind the camera, exploring their past, present and future.

ARTISTIC APPROACH:

My Two Polish Loves was filmed over three years. The production crew was always very small—Tali, Magda and another camerawoman—in order to keep the filming intimate and personal.

The film is a kind of road trip. During the journey, Tali is accompanied by the voice of her grandmother, Silvia, which Tali recorded during conversations over the years before Silvia passed away. Four stories told by Silvia are integrated into the film.

Magda is behind the camera while Tali is looking for fragments of her family history. Magda is also a protagonist. She enters into a dialogue with Tali about the stories she has heard and their connection to the places they visit. When the focus of filming shifts to their relationship and their shared Polish cultural heritage, Magda joins Tali in front of the camera.

The city of Lodz serves as a connection, a place of remembrance through urban spaces and landscapes. Recognizing the unavailability of a single location, the film suggests a multiplicity of locations for remembrance—geographical as well as mental, emotional and interpersonal.

QUOTE

**“Nothing changes anymore,
so you go back to the past.
It is known, young people talk
about the future
and old people talk about the past.
It cannot be otherwise.”**

Silvia Tiller



CREW

TALI TILLER

Director/Producer



An independent filmmaker. Born in Israel, living and working in Berlin since 2012. From 2007 to 2012 produced biographical documentaries, telling the stories of Holocaust survivors, Jews who came to Israel from different regions, and people who took part in the establishment of Israel in its early years, building cities and kibbutzim. Director of the film *Our Neve Zedek* (2009).

MAGDA WYSTUB

Director of Photography



A documentary filmmaker based in Berlin. Her debut film *Yes We Are* (2011), the first documentary focusing exclusively on the situation of lesbians in Poland, premiered in the Official Competition at Crossing Europe Film Festival 2011 in Linz, Austria, and won the Best Documentary Award 2012 at the International Queer Migrant Film Days festival in Vienna.

EVELYN RACK

Editor



Evelyn Rack is a Berlin-based film editor and video artist. Editing more than twenty films since 2004, she is best known today for her work on the multiple award-winning *Chaja & Mimi* (2009), as well as *Rotation* (2013) and *Oblivio* (2014). Her video installations have been screened in several European countries.

ALMUT WETZSTEIN

Camerawoman



Among her previous works: director and camerawoman of *Kumbia Queers: More louder bitte!* (2013), director's assistant: *Wer bist du, dass du sprichst?* (2006). Current works: camerawoman and sound engineer for "Activists of Berlin Feminist Movement from 1970s to 1990s" (2015-2018); Co-director, camerawoman and sound engineer: "German for Newcomers" (2016); Director, camerawoman and sound engineer: "Kapitalismustribunal" (2016-2017).

SUSANNE DZEIK

Camerawoman



Over 15 years of experience as a documentary filmmaker and as a camerawoman. Worked as a camerawoman for the film *Nach dem Brand*, which was nominated for Prix Europa 2012. Among her previous works: *Muevete* (1999), *Mate* (2004), *Von Mauern und Favelas* (2005). Her current documentary project is entitled "Cloud Making Machine."

PRODUCTION
PICTURES

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How did you come up with the idea of the film?

In the summer of 2013, Magda and I decided quite spontaneously to go to Wrocław to attend our friends' concert. For me, it was a nice opportunity to see the places in Wrocław where Magda was born and spent her childhood. We decided to also take a side trip to Łódź, where my grandparents spent their youth in the ghetto. It was the first time I'd visited Poland since a school trip I made as a teenager to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and I wanted to visit the places I'd heard about from my grandmother. Even though there was no plan to make a film, we decided to take the camera with us.

Our time in Łódź turned into a very powerful experience. Whenever I walked through the city, I had this surreal feeling of searching for something that is just not there anymore: the streets had been renamed over the years, buildings were destroyed or had changed completely, and the graves in the Jewish cemetery were barely visible beneath overgrown plants and mildew.

Suddenly, it dawned on me: Although the stories my grandmother had recounted to me happened not so long ago, everything is changing so quickly, and before long, my memories of these stories will be all that remains. Magda and I started to talk about how to not forget and not repeat the cruelty of the Holocaust: What is the impact of the personal and emotional experiences that are passed down from generation to generation? What makes us connect to the faith and feelings of another human being?

A trip that started as a personal journey into my family's past became the starting point of the film.

Why did you choose the title "My Two Polish Loves"?

When I went to Łódź, it was obvious to me that I was retracing my grandma's stories. Before she passed away, I filmed her telling me her life story, and after spending so much time together we became very close. The motivation of this trip was to stand before the places I'd heard about and stay connected to my grandmother.

While we were in Łódź and searching for the places, Magda very quickly became a protagonist in the film. Our bond there, unlike in Berlin where we met, became very strong thanks to our Polish heritage. Because I don't speak any Polish, Magda became the connecting thread between me and Łódź. We discovered similarity in our joyful appreciation of Polish food and how quickly it brings back memories of our grandmothers' homes. Although Magda left Poland at 8 years old with her family and I grew up in Israel, being together in Poland somehow felt very familiar to both of us.

Can you say a few words about the process of filming and how long it took to complete the film?

The filmmaking process was a bit of the reverse of what it normally is: we started rolling the camera before we ever envisioned making a film.

When we went to Łódź for the first time in the summer of 2013, my goal was to see the houses where my grandparents lived during the ghetto period—places about which I had heard so many stories. We had only taken the camera "just in case." I brought along a list of addresses I'd gotten from my grandfather before he died. We were wandering around in Łódź, but we couldn't find anything on this list, particularly because the street names had been given to me in German and a lot of the streets had been renamed as many as three times over Łódź's long history.

This experience of searching but not always finding, of disappearing traces, made us realize that we would need to do a lot more research.

Every summer after that until 2015, we travelled to Łódź and stayed there for one or two weeks. So all in all, we filmed over a period of three years. Post-production was completed in summer 2016.

How were you able to fund the film?

We had no funding at all in the first two years. I financed everything alone and everyone worked absolutely for free.

Later on, I created a crowd-funding campaign. It had a really big impact and helped a lot with accomplishing the production and some of the post-production. The film also received a grant from the Maecenia foundation for women in science and arts, which helped a lot with post-production. Still, the film has to be considered a low-budget production. In the end, we were only able to create the film through the help and support of the many people who believed in the importance of the film and contributed their talent and time to the process.

Was this your first film?

My Two Polish Loves is my first personal medium-length documentary film.

Until now, I made experimental shorts on the topic of gender, sexuality and identity. They were mainly shown at exhibitions and art events.

Also, from 2007 through 2012, I was the founder and director of Life Journey on Film, a documentary production company in Israel. During those years, I produced dozens of films about people with different backgrounds: Holocaust survivors, Jewish people who came to Israel from different countries, people who founded cities and kibutzim in Israel in its early years, etc.

How was it to make a personal documentary?

When we went to Lodz for the first time, it was only six months after my grandma passed away. While in Lodz I felt the loss very strongly, but I also felt her company. The film became a way for me to deal with my emotions, stay connected to her and honour her and her life.

So making *My Two Polish Loves* and dealing with my own personal family history was very challenging. It is definitely not easy to expose yourself and your emotions to a larger audience.

In the beginning, when it was just Magda and me and there was no intention of making a film, I didn't feel uncomfortable at all in front of the camera. But later on, it took me a while to shed the feeling of being observed during very private moments and just be present through my personal search.

What was the most remarkable moment?

One of the places I wanted to find was the grave of Shlomo Tiller, my great-grandfather. Except for my grandfather, no one had ever visited this place. When I arrived at the Jewish Cemetery in Lodz, I only had two notes my grandfather had written as directions to his father's grave: "Kabatara B, Street 1." After showing this to the cemetery caretaker, we got an idea of the general direction where the grave should be and started the search. We got lost several times in this overgrown forest and had to trudge through stinging nettle and bushes, getting bit by plenty of mosquitoes along the way. Never before had I been to a cemetery like this, where it seemed as though the graves themselves were buried.

When we finally found it, I was very moved. The grave was covered by branches that had fallen from the surrounding trees, and moss was growing all over the tombstone. When we cleared away all the debris, we uncovered a memorial candle. It was left by my grandfather more than 15 years ago and coated with moss. That's when I realised: I was the first person after my grandfather to visit this grave. If I hadn't come here, nature would have taken over. It would have become one of the many forgotten places.

Why do you feel the film is important?

As the generation of Holocaust survivors disappears, each year less people are left to tell the story. There is a need for ethical ways of remembrance that are not only respectful to survivors and their life stories, but also relevant for the current social realities of the third generation. This film responds to this need with its attentive approach to intimate relationships and closeness as a vehicle and living tool of memory—within families of Holocaust survivors, and between family members and their loved ones "from the outside." Moreover, it touches upon the complex subject of relations between descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of those who did nothing to resist the Holocaust.

Every place I discovered—or didn't discover—in Lodz brought a whole range of emotions. It encompasses all the questions that have arisen for me since my grandmother's death and since falling in love with Magda: Will future generations be at all interested in the history of the Holocaust if there are no longer any living witnesses? How important are the physical memories, the names, the homes and the graves for our rapidly changing society? What is the role of the so-called third generation, the grandchildren of those who survived or witnessed the Holocaust? How does our past inform who we are today, our complex and conflicting histories and identities? I feel that the film asks these questions in an honest, authentic and often humorous way.