

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE



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INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

SYNOPSIS

The delivery of a battered suitcase to Fumiko Ishioka at the Tokyo Holocaust Museum begins the true-life mystery that became the subject of Karen Levine's best-selling book Hana's Suitcase. The suitcase came from the Auschwitz Museum and had Hana Brady's name painted on it. Larry Weinstein's masterful film follows Fumiko's search to discover the details of Hana's life, which leads to the discovery of her brother George in Toronto. As small children they had been sent to Theresienstadt for being Jewish after the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939. A superb musical score by Alexina Louie and Alex Pauk, coupled with dramatic reenactments stunningly shot by Horst Zeidler, catches us by the heart to invoke the tragedy of the times. The voices of children from Japan, Canada, and the Czech Republic telling Hana's story are woven around the drama, along with George's memories and Fumiko's quest, to create a film of astonishing power and hope.

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Cast and Crew

Director	Larry Weinstein
Writer	Thomas Wallner
Cast	George Brady Lara Brady Fumiko Ishioka
Producers	Rudolf Biermann Jessica Daniel Larry Weinstein
Associate Producer	Austin Wong
Original Music	Alexina Louie Alex Pauk
Cinematography	Horst Zeidler
Film Editing	David New
Runtime	90 minutes
Country	Canada/Czech Republic
Language	English

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Director's Statement

I have to admit that I never wanted to make a Holocaust film. The subject was simply too dark and overwhelming to me. I had already made twenty-five films but they were all about music. Over the years, these films had increasingly touched upon extra-musical subjects - personalities, history, science, politics and even about the horrors of World War II, but they were still essentially music films.

Then a friend handed me the book "Hana's Suitcase" soon after it first appeared – I read it in spite of myself. I was stunned - it affected me beyond words, but in a very positive way. It was not only a powerful story about the Holocaust – it was filled with hope and with allegory. And it was beautifully structured with fluid movement from past to present, present to past and from continent to continent to continent. Above all, to me it was clearly meant to be a film. Not a journalistic documentary – though it could be that. Not a full-fledged dramatized narrative, though it could be that too. But I was convinced was that what this film really wanted to be was a hybrid documentary/drama. The drama would tell the back story, the documentary would tell the present day story and a number of mixed techniques could be used for everything else in between. And I realized that with all my heart, I truly wanted to direct this film – this Holocaust film.

* * * * *

I feel extremely fortunate to have been given the opportunity to make "Inside Hana's Suitcase". I got to know so many kind and generous individuals in Canada, Europe and Japan – above all George Brady (Hana's brother) and Fumiko Ishioka in Tokyo, who were a constant inspiration. Naturally, when one approaches a subject that is as powerful and pervasive as the Holocaust there is a tremendous responsibility for the filmmaker to portray it as accurately as possible, but also to differentiate it from other similar-themed films that have come before it. I feel that this story, through the courage and conviction of these two, achieves those goals.

This film has grown out of a remarkably popular book - "Hana's Suitcase" by Karen Levine – a book that in less than seven years, has been translated into over 40 different languages, has been read by millions around the world, and has even been adapted into several plays. In Canada alone it is estimated that half a million young people from ages nine to fourteen (many of whom are now young adults) have read the story of Hana and George Brady. So in a film of the same subject there is an implicit desire to follow the story of the book, but at the same time, a desire to go beyond the book in order to appeal to an even wider audience and address issues that will make it that much more a profound and satisfying film experience.

As a filmmaker who has previously made documentaries for television (though some have had limited theatrical runs) I have designed "Inside Hana's Suitcase" with the assumption that a theatrical film should go beyond a TV piece. This idea is what has guided us through our research, writing and stylistic approach – it has led us to devise a number of visually stunning techniques using animation, and dramatic stylizations that enhance the story's emotional core....

Perhaps the film's most powerful technique has nothing to do with special effects, animation or dramatization. It is our use of George himself to narrate his story with the help of Fumiko, George's daughter Lara, and a disarmingly insightful group of youthful storytellers from Canada, Japan and Czech Republic, all of whom comment on the story of Hana and George as well as speak about intolerance and compassion, cruelty and kindness, magic and loss. Most of all they underline a story which is harrowing in its sadness, yet sparkling with hope and promise. I am certain that in viewing "Inside Hana's Suitcase" an audience will discover a story that is very special and universal, but also uplifting in its promise of hope for Humanity.

Larry Weinstein
Director
Inside Hana's Suitcase

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Larry Weinstein –Director

So you think you know music documentaries? Welcome to the inventive works of Larry Weinstein, a wonderfully quirky filmmaker, whose career has been spent documenting the lives and works of composers Kurt Weill, Beethoven, Schoenberg, Ravel, Shostakovich, Weinzweig, Mozart and many more. But not in the normal way.

– Marc Glassman, “Roll Over Beethoven”

“Rhombus Media co-founder, Larry Weinstein is one of Canada's most prolific and accomplished documentary filmmakers. Having directed 25 films exploring musical creativity, Weinstein's work has consistently challenged documentary orthodoxy. He has worked with key cultural broadcasters and distributors around the world, and has screened his work in over 40 countries. The steadfast focus in his remarkable documentary work - to illuminate the complexities of the creative process of making music and to probe the relationship between musical imagination and everyday life - has marked his work for 25 years. He pushes the boundaries of conventional documentary storytelling by borrowing tools from fiction films, including dramatic reconstructions and historical cinematic stylings, and by improvising with experimental impressionistic visual analogies for music. A tireless innovator and committed artist, Weinstein continues to explore music as a dynamic embodied experience that flows through all our lives and enriches our souls.”

- [Citation given to Weinstein at Trailblazer Awards, Cannes, 2007]

Weinstein's films documenting the lives and art of 20th century composers: “Ravel's Brain”, “The Radical Romantic”, “When The Fire Burns: Manuel de Falla”, “My War Years: Arnold Schoenberg”, “Shadows & Light: Joaquin Rodrigo at 90”, “September Songs: The Music of Kurt Weill” and “The War Symphonies: Shostakovich Against Stalin” have been awarded at major film festivals around the world. His films have earned numerous Gemini and Emmy Awards and “Making Overtures – The Story of a Community Orchestra” received a 1986 Oscar nomination. In 1998, “Solidarity Song: The Hanns Eisler Story” won the Louvre's coveted “Classique en Images” as the world's best arts film over a 3 year span. His films have won more top awards at The Golden Prague than those of any other director in the festival's 46 years (1993/1995/1998/2006/2007)

Recent films include the musical/pathological/historical “Beethoven's Hair” (2005); “Burnt Toast” (2005) composed of 8 original comic mini-operas; and the provocative “Mozartballs” (2006). In late 2008 Weinstein completed two documentary/dramatic features: “Toscanini In His Own Words”, a recreated conversation of the famous Maestro that sheds new light on him. “Inside Hana's Suitcase”, Weinstein's first non-music film, is a powerful story about

a young Czech girl - one of the millions of victims of the Second World War. It has already earned standing ovations and a number of innovation and audience awards.

Recently Weinstein was honoured with a number of retrospectives of his work, including those at Hot Docs (Toronto), MOFFOM (Prague), and DocAviv (Tel Aviv), Look of The Sound (Bremen) and The Jakarta Film Festival in Indonesia. Weinstein graduated from and received the degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) from York University. In addition to sitting on a number of boards and advisory committees, he recently served as the Senior Creative Counsellor and co-designer of the CFC/NFB Feature Documentary Program. He lives in Toronto with his wife, Mary, and his daughters, Ali and Dania.

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

George Brady's Statement about "Inside Hana's Suitcase"

Sharing the tragedies that I faced in my life was often a daunting task and something I perhaps avoided for much of my life. Then, nine years ago, Fumiko Ishioka came into my life and transformed the tragedy of my beloved sister Hana's fate into a lesson for children around the world. Ever since then, and with Fumiko's encouragement, I have willingly opened up about my experiences.

In recent years, Hana's story has spread via radio, a book, television, on stage and even through school projects around the globe. Just when I thought the story had been told in every medium, Larry Weinstein proposed making a film that would be both documentary and drama. And in the end he managed to respectfully and powerfully bring the story to life onscreen.

The film's technique of telling the story through the perspective of children from around the world, captures the heart of our message. That, combined with interviews with those who knew Hana and those who have been by my side as the story has come to light, is especially illuminating.

Bringing to life a story that began over 70 years ago is not an easy task. I told Larry that I would want to attend many of the film shoots even though he warned me that some of the scenes might be quite painful for me. But I thought, how often do you get to see your own childhood recreated? I was really touched by so many of these scenes and I was struck by how remarkably reminiscent they were of our experiences – how they reflected my own memories. Yes, many were very sad, but there was something beautiful about the experience.

Since the completion of the film, I have had the opportunity to watch it with audiences and I see how much they are affected. The extent of their reaction continues to renew my faith in how one person's life can change millions. My little sister was murdered at 13, but her story continues to resonate more than six decades after the fact. And, most importantly, it gives me great hope that in light of the state of current world events, "Inside Hana's Suitcase" will become more and more relevant by reminding future generations of the importance of family, freedom, compassion and respect for others. I hope Hana's tragedy encourages people to explore history and learn more about the consequences of hatred and intolerance.

"Inside Hana's Suitcase" answers many of the questions that Fumiko, Lara and I are often asked as we travel. Our emphasis has always been on how it is the next generation that has the opportunity and the responsibility to create a better world. It is up to the young people. I lost many family members and friends as a

result of the Holocaust – so did millions of others, but I have come to believe that our story speaks for those who have no one to tell theirs. It speaks for the millions whose stories could never be told.

George Brady

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Fumiko Ishioka on “Inside Hana’s Suitcase”

Hana’s Suitcase arrived at the Tokyo Holocaust Center in Spring 2000. Back then I never ever imagined that this one ordinary, empty suitcase would carry a story that would be told first in a book and then a film 10 years later. My first years of journey with Hana’s Suitcase were filled with a lot of surprises, coincidences, and mixture of emotions. It was heartbreaking when I thought of the fate of little, innocent Hana, and you can easily imagine my excitement when I first met Hana’s surviving brother, George, my true hero now. Thanks to his courage to talk about his most difficult memories, Hana’s Suitcase was able to start a new journey of sharing the lessons of history with children all over the world. In the process I have had a chance to meet so many wonderful people – those who have told and shared the story of Hana in different ways, but also the many all over the world who seem as affected by this story as much as I have been.

I remember when I first met Larry Weinstein, who was full of ideas on how he wanted to make this story into a film. Then he and Thomas Wallner, the writer, came to Japan and we spent a good amount of time together. We visited Hiroshima. We talked about Japan’s own aggression in Asia during WWII. I showed them how I was trying to share the lessons of the Holocaust with children living in a small island country like Japan.

Once the filming started, I was constantly reminded how lucky I was to be able to work with such a talented and dedicated group of people. I truly appreciate and admire the work of Larry and everyone involved in the making of this film as they treated this story with so much care, love, and respect. Thanks to their work, Hana’s Suitcase is no longer empty. It is filled, not just with sad memories, but with life and hope for the future.

As the United Nations declares, the Holocaust is “a warning to all people of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice”. I hope that the viewers of this film, young and adult, will join us in spreading the message of tolerance and understanding so we can make this world a more compassionate place.

Fumiko Ishioka
Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Centre
Tokyo, Japan

the Hot Docs Daily.

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Q & A: INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Posted Thu, April 30, 2009 in [Features and Q&As](#)



Senior Canadian Programmer Lynne Fernie interviews [INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE](#) filmmaker Larry Weinstein.

A name scrawled on a suitcase delivered from Auschwitz leads a Japanese teacher to unravel the mystery of its owner, a young Jewish girl. Documentary and drama blend in INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE, a film of astonishing power and hope, based on the best selling book.

Lynne Fernie: INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE is a departure in subject matter from your previous films. How did it come about?

Larry Weinstein: *Hana's Suitcase* is a very popular and moving book by Toronto's own Karen Levine in the vein of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in terms of a Holocaust story that reaches out to young people. In 2002, a filmmaker/literary agent who had just read the book, David Johnston, attended a master class I did at Banff about my film *RAVEL'S BRAIN* and he thought that it would be interesting in terms of the blending of documentary with dramatic recreation if the filmmaker who made *RAVEL'S BRAIN* made a film based on *Hana's Suitcase*. I read the book and thought – yes, with the correct ingredients, this would be a perfect hybrid documentary. I always love hybrid documentaries when they work – just look at *MAN ON WIRE* as a great example. It took a long time to get the rights to the book because there was a dramatic feature film version that was being negotiated with the publisher at the time. We finally got the rights in the summer of 2006, and then immediately got funding.

What was the most difficult aspect of making the film?

Well, in a way, the aspect that I feared the most before starting was realizing that the success of the film hung on the characters of George Brady (Hana's brother) and Fumiko Ishioka. Thomas Wallner, the writer,

and I could fantasize all we wanted about possible scenes, but if either George or Fumiko were not “film friendly” our concepts couldn’t work. But then I met George – we actually met when he attended the Hot Docs Focus On retrospective of my films in 2005. He was basically checking me out and thankfully I passed the test. I think it was BEETHOVEN’S HAIR that impressed him the most. Anyway, as you can see in the film, George is a perfect “protagonist” and so is Fumiko, as we found out when we visited her in Tokyo prior to filming. The most difficult thing was getting the funding because many people thought, “Oh no, another Holocaust film!”

What did you hope to accomplish in the film?

The funding issue affects this question because I wanted to make a film that was not “another Holocaust film.” I knew that, following the inspiration of Karen Levine’s book, this could be a film about hope, one that stressed the importance of tolerance, about reaching out rather than closing up and fearing the “other.” One aspect of the film that I feel works quite magically and is often the first thing that people point out, is the use of our young storytellers – kids from 9 to 12 from Canada, Japan and the Czech Republic. They are the “omniscient” narrators and also a kind of Greek chorus for the film. Of course they knew the story because they had read the book first – but there’s something both disarmingly innocent and also very worldly and wise about their responses as they reflect upon the story’s message.

We were very lucky that the new Telefilm/CBC/Rogers Theatrical Documentary Fund was represented by five very open-minded individuals who also understood the message, and they supported the film because they sensed that people would be interested in a film with this message. When we tried to get funding from other countries, we ran into the “not another Holocaust film” mentality. It’s interesting that the themes in the film have now become Obama’s messages.

The dramatizations beautifully evoke the aesthetics of post-war feature films. Were there particular films, directors or cinematographers who inspired the dramas?

The Director of Photography for the film is a post-war German – actually a German who, born in 1942, played as a child on the piles of rubble of bombed out Berlin. Horst Zeidler has shot 13 films with me and he seemed to be perfect, not only because of his wonderful aesthetic sense and because he was so versed in post-war depictions of the war, but also because he formed such a warm rapport with George and Fumiko. We actually used some shots of a 1949 Czech feature film that depicts the hardships of life in Terezin (Theresienstadt) Ghetto during the war. This affected our style because our dramatizations are intercut with theirs and I wanted that transition to be pretty seamless. Also our choice to achieve images that were blurry around the edges and dreamlike was something that was very attractive to Thomas Wallner and myself, and then achieved by Vincent Marcone at My Pet Skeleton and David Hedley at Optix. We all spent a lot of time on the look.

Your previous documentaries have focused on musicians and music. Did this inform the musical score for INSIDE HANA’S SUITCASE?

I am very proud of the score of this film and it is interesting that minute for minute there is more music in INSIDE HANA’S SUITCASE than there is for nearly any of my music films! The original part of the score is by my longtime friends and collaborators Alex Pauk and Alexina Louie. They heard what David New – my editor extraordinaire – and I were trying to do with existing music and tried to de-intensify parts of the film so the audience wouldn’t become fatigued with angst! But they used sleight of hand because their music blends perfectly into the other music. The other music accounts for two-thirds of the score: pieces by composers who, like George and Hana, were interned at Terezin during the war, and then, like Hana, died in Auschwitz. I could go on and on about this music but I won’t here. Those composers are Pavel Haas, Gideon Klein and Hans Krasa. There is also music by the Czech Bohuslav Martinu and the only German composer who lived under Hitler entirely anti-Fascist, Karl Amadeus Hartmann.

What is your greatest fear when taking on a new project?

I approach each film with absolute trepidation and dread. I never feel worthy of the subject and when it has to do with other cultures, histories, languages – I feel like an imposter. But then I always feel that a director is something of an actor – a method actor. We have to play roles and become the characters, the stories, and the perspectives that we portray. But in a way that is sidestepping this question. As a documentary filmmaker I have a responsibility to my subject and there are no shortcuts in addressing that responsibility. It becomes an ethical question. Documentary filmmakers – all of them – seem to have real commitment. Look at the line up at Hot Docs this year alone. When I look at the Kevin McMahons, Barry Greenwalds, Jennifer Baichwals, Ron Manns, Alan Zweigs, Kirby Dicks – it is actually mind-boggling what these people do. I’m proud to be even remotely associated with them.

Larry, just to end our interview, here are some fun questions that I’m sure people are dying to know.

My favourite doc of all time is...

I've said it before: BORAT: CULTURAL LEARNINGS OF AMERICA FOR MAKE BENEFIT GLORIOUS NATION OF KAZAKHSTAN. But I'm also a bit obsessed by Buñuel's crude and cruel LAS HURDES (1933) because of its sickening juxtaposition of human frailty and Brahms' 4th Symphony. Oh – Alain Renais' NIGHT AND FOG (1955) with music by Hanns Eisler.

The doc I'm embarrassed to admit I still have never seen is...

I've missed films by Allan King, by Fredrick Wiseman, by Gail Singer, by Barry Greenwald that I have to catch up on – and thousands that I haven't heard of by others so I don't know what I'm missing! Oh, I've also never seen ARISTOCRATS and I won't let anyone talk about it because I don't want to hear the jokes.

The person living or dead I would most like to work with is...

I think Maurice Ravel would have created a nice score for me, Cervantes a good script and, had he lived a bit longer, Harry Houdini would have been destined to become a great filmmaker of the Orson Welles type. I would have loved to know those two as well.

The film at Hot Docs I really want to see is...

I guess now that I've admitted my guilty pleasure I have to say CARMEN MEETS BORAT, but I'm also dying to see the films of the other filmmakers listed above.

If I weren't a documentary filmmaker, I would be...

I am incompetent at everything. I rely on everyone else for all that I do – my wife, Mary, my cameraman, my editor, my producer, my associates at Rhombus. If I were not what I am I'd either wilt and die or maybe – just maybe – become a professional bowler or Balinese gamelan musician.

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE screens tonight at 9:30 PM at the Winter Garden Theatre and on Sunday, May 3 at 1:30 PM at the Isabel Bader Theatre (Sunday screening is rush only).

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Press Quotes from Opening Night Presentation at 2009 HotDocs

“Brilliant and beautiful... this is the kind of documentary that wins Oscars.”

Brian D. Johnson, Macleans, Canada

“An expertly crafted documentary...a moving and valuable film for adults and children.”

Guy Dixon, The Globe and Mail

“...Compelling...tremendously affirming...”

Lee Ferguson, CBC

“...Heart-rendering...”

Liz Braun, Toronto Sun

“...Unique...the work of an artist in his prime...a masterful weave of art and artifact.”

Brian D. Johnson, Macleans, Canada

“The re-enactments are meticulously researched and beautifully shot.”

Susan Cole, NOW Magazine

“Wonderfully resonant...complex, creative, inventive and emotionally potent...A richly rewarding experience.”

Martin Knelman, The Toronto Star

“Slickly edited...a carefully paced tale of loss and remembrance.”

Barry Hertz, National Post

“...Inspiring...Inside Hana's Suitcase...brings a message of hope.”

Sherry Smither, The Canadian Jewish News

“A vividly visual dimension rarely achieved in historical documentaries. This is truly a film you will never forget.”

Charles Martin, Filmthreat.com

“Art ripe with emotion draws its audience to an inescapable reality. More than a documentary – a tragic, moving story.”

Glen Russel, Northernstars.ca

“Weinstein displays considerable flair, both with image and sound, producing a document to the Brady family that has true universality.”

Dan Jardine, Cinemania

[Back to New film adds hope to Hana's suitcase](#)

New film adds hope to Hana's suitcase

April 29, 2009
Martin Knelman



Larry Weinstein, director of the documentary 'Hana's Suitcase,' with Holocaust survivor George Brady. At right, George as a child with his sister Hana.

TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR/SUPPLIED PHOTO

"I always talk too much, but I can tell you stories," George Brady explained yesterday while chatting about *Inside Hana's Suitcase*: Larry Weinstein's wonderfully resonant, bittersweet film, which will have its world premiere tomorrow at the Winter Garden Theatre on opening night of Hot Docs.

Brady is the 81-year-old surviving brother of the young Holocaust victim whose memory has been kept alive by the tale of her suitcase. This soft-spoken grandfather, a retired plumber, can indeed tell stories, although he pretty much kept them to himself for more than half a century. Now his understated charm and decency light up the screen.

The story of Hana's suitcase has been told in so many forms and has become familiar to so many people that the question has to be asked. Was it really necessary for Weinstein to make the feature film?

The answer, it turns out, is a resounding yes. *Inside Hana's Suitcase* gives the material such a complex, creative, inventive and emotionally potent spin that, from one moment to the next, the movie holds you with what feels like a series of fresh revelations.

Whether you've encountered this story before, on radio or TV, in Karen Levine's bestselling book or the play based on it, this new film is un-missable. That is partly because of Brady, who quietly projects star power.

"I am a logical person, but this story defies logic," Brady explained while he and Weinstein were interviewed at the downtown office of Rhombus Media.

For years he said little about his horrific past, even to his children. After enjoying a very happy and secure childhood growing up in a loving family in Nové Mesto, a town in what was then Czechoslovakia, he watched his parents being arrested and taken away after the Nazi invasion, never to be seen again.

He and his younger sister, Hana, were sent to Theresienstadt (a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia), but separated when he was sent to Auschwitz. He survived the Nazi death camp, but Hana, who was sent there a few months later, did not.

After returning to their hometown, George eventually moved to Toronto, because his grandfather's brother lived here. For decades, he rarely spoke about the Nazi horrors he witnessed.

"I couldn't get away from my terrible memories, but I didn't want to inflict them on my family."
But then something miraculous happened. He got a letter from Fumiko Ishioka, who runs a Holocaust education centre in Tokyo. She and her students seemed to have received the suitcase that Hana left when she died in Auschwitz.

Thus began an astonishing dialogue between Hana's brother and a group of children in Tokyo (Ishioka's students) who felt an intense bond with Hana. Brady and his daughter flew to Tokyo to meet them. Ishioka and those kids play a major role in Weinstein's movie, along with other children in Toronto and the Czech Republic.

"To me it was clear that the strongest possible film would be a hybrid," says Weinstein, who has previously been known for documentaries about music.

"People thought it was odd I would suddenly be making a movie on this subject, and that made it hard to raise the money. But this is not like other Holocaust films. It is narrated by idealistic children, and it's all about hope and tolerance."

What he has produced is far from a conventional talking-heads doc. It weaves together many elements: animation, magic realism, dramatic recreation and those irresistible child narrators.

Ironically, it turned out that the suitcase that caused a stir in Tokyo was not the original but a replica. The real suitcase, on loan from the Auschwitz Museum, had been destroyed by neo-Nazi hooligans in Birmingham, England. That act of vandalism gives this story a dark postscript. Yet despite the horrors it depicts, *Inside Hana's Suitcase* is a richly rewarding experience.

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