

Berlin Calling

A Documentary

Official Selection

WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival 2014

Featuring

Kastle Wasserman

Ben Wasserman

Written by Nigel Dick and Kastle Wasserman

Narrated by Nigel Dick

Filmmakers

Directed, Produced by Nigel Dick

Edited by Eddi Ackit

Music by Nigel Dick

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Synopsis

As a child growing up in suburban Houston, Kastle always knew the big dark cloud hung over her family. But her father, Ben, never talked about his past. He was busy building a business, raising his children and trying to be a like every other normal family.

As Kastle went through a rebellious phase of punk rock, shaved her head into a Mohawk and moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in journalism, she unknowingly touched a nerve of her father's deepest fears of persecution and separation anxiety.

It wasn't until she reached her 30s that she began to turn her investigative skills on herself and her father to understand some of the emotions they carried with them and uncover what happened to him during his childhood in the dark days of Berlin and the Holocaust.

The documentary "Berlin Calling" follows Kastle on a journey of discovery, through five cities – Berlin, Prague, Paris, Los Angeles and Houston. We see Kastle open the paperwork the Nazis kept on her family and hear her father's firsthand account of being a child under Hitler's oppression of the Jews and his time in a concentration camp.

In her research, Kastle also makes a surprising discovery - the fate of a family member who disappeared in the early days of persecution.

Throughout the film, background lessons of the Holocaust are told through historical photos, film footage and narration to provide context of the family's story.

Told through the eyes of a second-generation Holocaust survivor, this amazing true account of one family in the big shadow of one of history's most harrowing times, reveals the emotional impact that is handed down through generations.

About the Production

Berlin Calling was filmed in five cities (Berlin, Prague, Paris, Los Angeles, Houston) over the course of 4 years. We meet Kastle as she is embarking on research to uncover the facts about her father's experience in the Holocaust. As a journalist, she was trained to ask questions and always knew this big dark cloud from the history books hung over her family. Now she sets out to put her investigative skills to work, not by interviewing strangers but by interviewing her own father and visiting the city where he was born, persecuted by the Nazi's and ultimately put in a concentration camp.

We see Kastle's rebellious side as a teenager, drawn to the energy of punk bands and shaving her head into a Mohawk, which strikes a nerve in her father marking her as different and the fears he has of persecution and separation anxiety.

Throughout the film, Kastle's father Ben, shares his firsthand account of Jewish persecution and his family's struggle to escape and hide from the Nazi's. We visit the Holocaust Museum Houston where he has donated artifacts including the family photos his mother carried hidden in her clothes and the yellow cloth Jewish star he was forced to wear.

Kastle's journey takes her to the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to see the infamous villa where the Nazi's came up with their plan for "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" in 1942. In this beautiful setting, she finds it hard to believe people could turn to such cruelty.

She then takes to the streets of Berlin to see the neighborhood where her father was born, where Kristallnacht brought terror to her father for the first time, and where her grandfather was arrested and taken away. She sees the location of the apartment building where her father and his family hid from the Nazi's, and finds the mass grave where her grandfather's ashes were sent after dying in Buchenwald.

She finds the actual train platform where her father was loaded into a cattle car and sent to Theresienstadt concentration camp.

At the invitation of the German government, Ben is invited to return Berlin for a visit. The film follows Kastle and her father as they visit the locations where he once lived and thrived and work through the difficult emotions of being in the city that

turned on their family. Kastle also takes her father and uncle to the gravesite of their father in the Jewish Cemetery.

Kastle goes to Prague and visits the actual buildings in the concentration camp where her father was held in overcrowded barracks that were infested with disease and filth, and the bakery where he was forced to work, which held a silver lining because he was able to sneak bread to avoid starvation. She also sees the train tracks where her father narrowly escaped deportation to Auschwitz.

While in Prague, Kastle takes time to pay homage to two Czech resistance fighters, Jan Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík who bravely set out to assassinate German Nazi official Reinhard Heydrich, who masterminded the Final Solution.

Kastle also hears of the happiest days of her father's life: being liberated from the camp and landing in New York City to start a new life. She learns of his proudest moments serving in the U.S. Air Force, flying 75 combat missions and earning the Distinguished Flying Cross, the United Nations Medal, the Korean Campaign Ribbon, National Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal and the Air Medal, which he was awarded three times. He later achieved his US Citizenship, which he claims as one of the biggest highlights of his life.

In her research, Kastle also makes a surprising discovery - the fate of a family member, dear to her father's heart, who disappeared in the early days of persecution.

Throughout the film, background lessons of the Holocaust are told through historical photos and film footage and narration to provide context of the family's story.

By the end of the film Kastle and the audience have a clear understanding of the small story of one family in the big shadow of one of history's most harrowing times, The Holocaust.

About the Cast

Kastle Wasserman

As a child growing up in suburban Houston, Kastle always knew she wanted to be a writer, starting from writing stories to give to her parents, to writing for music fanzines to eventually earning a degree in journalism and becoming a reporter and editor for the *Los Angeles Times*. Drawn to the energy of punk rock, Kastle spent most of her young adult life in nightclubs. She left Houston at age 20 to go to Los Angeles to follow the music that spoke to her for reasons she didn't always understand. As a journalist, most of Kastle's career consisted of interviewing other people, until one day she turned the questions on herself and her father to find out the family's connection to the Holocaust and the undercurrent of troubled emotions that hung heavy on them. When she met director Nigel Dick, they began filming

research conducted to trace her father's story. The end result is "Berlin Calling." She is currently working on a book on her relationship with her father.

Ben Wasserman

He was a normal kid growing up in Berlin, Germany. Little did he know that the fact he was Jewish would change his childhood forever. As the wrath of the Nazi's came down in the early 1940's, Ben's father was arrested and sent to Buchenwald Concentration Camp, never to be seen again. The rest of the family went into hiding for many months before they were found by the Gestapo and sent to Theresienstadt Concentration Camp for two years of living in a constant state of fear, starvation, disease and filth. The camp was liberated in May 1945, just before Ben's 16th birthday. He, his mother and brother survived and went to the United States where they made new lives for themselves. Ben joined the US Air Force and fought in the Korean War earning the Distinguished Flying Cross among other medals. He later relocated to Houston, Texas where he married, started a successful business and raised two children. In the 1990's, he began giving lectures about his time in the Holocaust to educate and raise awareness of this time in history from a first hand account.

John Wasserman

Ben's brother, John, was born into the Nazi uprising. He was only two-years-old when his father was taken away and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp where he perished. He was four-years old when he was sent with his mother and Ben to Theresienstadt concentration camp. He was among the children the Nazi's paraded out for the Red Cross visitation in an attempt to fool them into thinking Theresienstadt was a "model ghetto." Out of the 15,000 children under the age of fifteen sent to the camp, John and Ben were two of less than 1000 who survived. Following liberation and the family's move to America, John made a life for himself in Florida where he started his own business. He has three children and four grandchildren. He had never spoken about the Holocaust prior to this film.

With appearances by:

Tamar Gablinger - a tour guide and researcher in Berlin, Germany

Eliska Levinska - a tour guide and social worker in Prague, Czech Republic. She is a survivor of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz concentration camps

Aubrey Pomerance -Director of Archives at the Jewish Museum Berlin

Narration by the film's director/producer, Nigel Dick

About the Filmmakers

Nigel Dick

Award winning, British born, filmmaker Nigel Dick has directed over 340 music videos and won 3 MTV awards, 2 Billboard Awards and 3 MVPA awards. Nigel has been responsible for some of the most influential videos in music video history

including Guns n' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle", Oasis' "Wonderwall" and Britney Spears' "Baby One More Time." Nigel trained as an architect before pursuing a career in the record business where he worked for Stiff Records and Polygram. He moved to Los Angeles in the mid '80s and started a directing career and co-founded Propaganda Films. In 2000 Nigel directed MTV's first ever made-for-TV movie, "[2GETHER.](#)" Nigel's career has since spanned commercials, reality shows, the independent comedy film, "[Callback](#)," and now his first independent documentary film, "Berlin Calling."

Crew:

Camera - D.P. Quickly

Editor - Eddi Ackit

Music - Nigel Dick

Production Manager (Berlin) - Julia Kaczmarek

Production Manager (Prague) - Filip Hejduk

Location Scout (Prague) - Dana Cerna

Driver (Prague) - Pavel Jumar

Photoshop Artist - Andrew Kavanagh

Colorist - Jod Soraci

Graphic Design - Lynda Karr

Post Production Mixer - Jay Shilliday, Slate Run Productions

Avid Technician - Bobby Lea

Editorial Assistance - Bruce Ochmanek