

Poignant lessons, packed in a suitcase

By Daniel M. Kimmel

One of the most important accomplishments of the vast array of Holocaust films and books is reclaiming the lives of those who perished. Jews are not supposed to count people, yet we use “the Six Million” as a short hand, which is an injustice to the individual human beings whose lives were snuffed out. “Inside Hana’s Suitcase” is the incredible story of how one of those lives was uncovered and shared with the world.

In 2000, Fumiko Ishioka, a teacher at the Tokyo Holocaust Center, received a package for a display. It was the suitcase of a young girl named Hana Brady; it was one of the artifacts recovered at Auschwitz. Ishioka wondered who Hana Brady was and launched a research project that is the subject of the film.

She learned the fate of Hana, who was interned at Terezin before being sent to Auschwitz. Then she discovered that Hana’s older brother, George, had survived and was living in Toronto (he is expected to appear at several weekend showings of the film at West Newton Cinema). The story of Hana’s life and death is a tragic one, yet the fact that it has become the subject of an internationally successful book and now a movie represents a triumph of sorts. As one of the schoolchildren interviewed in the movie notes, Hana had wanted to be a



Movie Maven

“Inside Hana’s Suitcase” opens Nov. 11 at the West Newton Cinema. 617-964-8074 or westnewtoncinema.com.

teacher when she grew up. Now, more than 60 years later, she’s teaching the world.

Although the movie hits some of the notes one expects, there are surprising ele-

ments as well. As the story unfolds in Japan, Canada, and the former Czechoslovakia (where Hana and her family lived), we hear not only from Ishioka, Brady and a few surviving witnesses, but also from the children who talk about Hana and the lessons they’ve learned from discovering the details of her life.

George and Hana were the only Jewish children in their town and were isolated when the various discriminatory laws were enacted by the Nazis. The modern children are told not to remain silent when those

who are different from them are being picked on for whatever reason.

We also meet a survivor of Hiroshima who is on the board of the Tokyo Holocaust Center. What’s the connection? The elderly woman makes it clear that although she, too, is a survivor, her situation was quite different from that of the Jews of Europe. While she preaches peace and understanding, she explains to the Japanese schoolchildren that Japan was one of the instigators of the war and thus its citizens paid a terrible price. Hiroshima was bombed because of the actions of Japan, not because of a genocidal crusade. The Jews of Europe, she points out by way of contrast, were innocent, attacked solely because of *who* they were, not because of anything they did.

Like “Paper Clips” (2004), this is a movie about people – particularly schoolchildren – wholly removed from any connection to the Holocaust coming to grips with this sad chapter of history in a way that can restore your faith in humanity. It may not be a “feel good” Holocaust film, but it is most definitely a hopeful one.

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Mamet tells how the left gets it wrong

By Len Abram

Special to the Advocate

In fluorescent white, pristine supermarkets can’t hold a candle to the old North End market, where vendors hawk their produce and meat from stalls, and fruit often spills onto the streets. Careful where they step, consumers decide from whom to buy and at what price. Similarly, in the trading pits of commodity exchanges, buyers and sellers shout offers and counter-offers until they, too, make a deal.

In theory, if not always in practice, such is how a democracy makes up its mind.

David Mamet’s “The Secret Knowledge” explores the strident marketplace of ideas, dissecting the left and the right. For Mamet, *right* means both less government and *correct*.

It’s naive, he argues, to assume that government knows best – that like some shaman, it possesses “secret knowledge.” We are better off trusting the native intelligence of the American people than the collective wisdom of bureaucracies. He believes that the free market does a better job allocating resources than any government, however well intentioned.

Not for Mamet the policies of President Barack Obama, whose election represents to many conservatives the high water mark for the liberal tide in our country, with its Keynesian economic stimulus programs and increased financial regulation.

Among Mamet’s many analogies to illustrate his civics and history lessons is the jury trial. Twelve men and women, drawn at random from the ranks of citizens, listen to experts for the prosecution and defense, but in the end decide

Book Review

“The Secret Knowledge: On the Dismantling of American Culture,” by David Mamet. Sentinel (Penguin) Press, 2011.

for themselves which side has made the best case. Yes, the outcome is at times flawed: The innocent have been jailed (or worse) and the guilty have gone free. But we rely on the jury getting it right, most of the time.

And that’s a central point in Mamet’s sober take on life and politics: no person, system or government program is perfect. Our Founding Fathers called for the freedom to pursue happiness, but offered no guarantee it could be attained.

Mamet dismisses as doomed to fail any ideology that promotes utopian hopes, such as Marxism or socialism, or that promises social justice through government rather than individual action, such as liberalism. Any program – say, affirmative action – that provides justice for one aggrieved group will do an injustice to another.

Mamet tells the anecdote of a Buddhist monk who goes on a thousand-mile spiritual journey.

When he arrives, he discovers an ant in the folds of his tunic, an ant that lives nowhere else but the monk’s home village. So the monk walks back to return the ant. Noble? Maybe. But Mamet wonders how many ants the monk might accidentally step on as he retraces the thousand-mile journey.

Mamet does not question the humane motives of many on the left, many of which he shares. But good intentions are not enough. He often quotes an icon of the conservative movement, the Nobel-winning Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, author of “The Road to Serfdom.” Hayek subscribes to what Mamet refers to as “the Tragic View.” Human beings make mistakes in their behavior and assumptions all the time. Perfection cannot be legislated, and nothing is free while everything has a cost. But despite its imperfections, the free market is preferable to the control of the state. It adjusts to changing tastes and needs; whereas government programs, such as farm subsidies, seem to have a life of their own.

Although Mamet didn’t write with a Jewish audience in mind, his liberal Jewish roots inform the book. Having moved to the right, he criticizes Jews on the left who are harshly critical of Israel. Mamet

imagines Jewish liberals faced with the choice of two planes: one bound for Syria, the other Israel.

“No one reading this book would get on the plane to Syria,” he writes. “It is despotism, opposed to the West, to women, to gays, to Jews, to free speech. It is a heinous Arab version of National Socialism, dedicated to the murder of every person in Israel. And yet one may gain status or ... solidarity by embracing the ‘Arab Cause.’”

Whether Mamet infuriates or informs, the market – the readers – will decide.



David Mamet

Jeffrey R. Dornbush, D.D.S.

Is hiding chipped, stained or crowded teeth making you self-conscious about some aspect of your smile? Do you have a painful tooth or bleeding gums? Have you made a decision to take action but you do not know where to go? If so, you owe it to yourself to visit the prosthodontic practice of Dr. Jeffrey Dornbush.

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Jeffrey R. Dornbush, D.D.S.
Prosthodontist

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Inessa M., Chairside Dental Assistant



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