

Article

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Roman Polanski Revisited the Terror of WW-II: POLANSKI, HOROWITZ. HOMETOWN



It is said that childhood is best period of one's life. but not for all. Many of them have had bad memories of childhood. Acclaimed Film Director Roman Polanski is one of them. He has survived during Nazi regime in Poland. He was five years old when his mother was killed in concentration camp in Poland and father was put in the holocaust to suffer. A catholic family residing outside the town gave shelter to this five years old boy and saved his life. Story of acclaimed photographer Ryszard Horowitz is the same. Both survived during Nazi regime and now at their 80ies they have visited the horror again. Documentary POLANSKI, HOROWITZ. HOMETOWN follows both the legendary characters revisiting their

traumatic childhood from the city of Krakow Ghetto in Poland. Documentary directed and produced by Mateusz Kudla and Anna Kokoszka-Romer, was recently premiered in Warsaw, which has got good response from the audience.

The German invasion of Poland began in last week of September 1939. Nazi authorities had established and sealed a ghetto in Krakow. Nearly twenty thousand Jews were force to live in ghetto which were enclosed by fences and stone wall. Roman Polanski was just five years old. For the first time Polanski experienced the terror when he saw aged woman was killed by Nazi soldiers. She was tried and was not able to move. These memories

always haunted him. In a documentary *Roman Polanski: A Film Memoir 2011*, he shared this traumatic experience of WWII and Holocaust. But this new documentary is personal experience of Polanski and Ryszard Horowitz who was saved by German Industrialist Oskar Schindler. They both belongs Krakow and both had shared similar experience of terror during Nazi occupancy.

"I have always been a fan of Roman Polanski's work. When I was writing my master's thesis about him. I noticed that there are many books and publications about him, but not much of them said about his life during the war. I dreamed of exploring this subject and make a film about that part of his life. Later at work, Mateusz and I met and it turned out that we had the same ideas. We joined forces. When Roman Polanski visited Poland in 2014 (his presence was linked to the fact that "J'acuse" was to be directed in Krakow) I met Polanski's lawyer - Jan Olszewski. He believed in our project and introduced it and us to Roman Polanski. Polanski quickly agreed. He also wanted to tell this story about this part of his life in this form. He gave one condition: only with Ryszard Horowitz. The artists he met in childhood, in the Krakow ghetto. Since then they have been friends. Then there was a stalemate for some time. Roman Polanski said "I'll do it if Ryszard does it," and Ryszard Horowitz said "I'll do it if Roman does it." Fortunately, they finally came to an agreement." Anna explained the process of procurement of the documentary.

about revisiting childhood. 84 years Roman Polanski and 79 years Ryszard Horowitz visit the place they haven't been since 1942. Both of them explored the city which has significantly changed now. But some buildings are still there to tell their own stories. They had visited the theatre where they used to watch movies. That was Polanski's first encounter with the world of cinema.



Making documentary on someone's life especially like Roman Polanski and Ryszard Horowitz was not easy task. It required lots of research and evidences from the past.

"We spent hundreds of hours in archives and film libraries looking for archival photos and footage. The hardest thing was finding a family, which saved Roman Polanski during the Holocaust (hiding in the village). Polański returned to Poland twice to find them, but all traces of them were lost. We looked for them for many years. Finally, we reached to a grandson who did not know that his grandmother hide a Jew. He was surprised again, when I told him that hide grandmother hide Roman Polański." said Mateusz Kudla.

Polanski and Horowitz both have become very emotional while telling their first encounter with horror of war. Both of them had traumatic childhood. "Polanski had been alone since the outbreak of the war, his childhood was taken from him very early. Horowitz had no childhood at all... his first memories are related to the reality of war." added Mateusz Kudla. This memories of war was so traumatic we can see in documentary that Polanski visited his



POLANSKI, HOROWITZ. HOMETOWN, documentary is not only about the trauma but more

grandmother place and return without knocking the door as he don't want to recollect the memories.

It was task for Mateusz Kudla and Anna Kokoszka-Romer to produce this documentary. Financially it was very hard. Polish film institutes were not interested in making the film. So, both of them put their own money and took loans, as they feel it's could be testimony of war and Holocaust. "We knocked on to a lot of doors. The support came only from Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany and ZAiKS (Polish Society of Authors and Composers). Not a single institution that should support filmmakers and artists found our project interesting. We are still paying off those debts. But we learned a lot. We did the research, documentation, editing, directing, production, TV and online distribution, and even marketing ourselves." Said Anna.

Finally, film was made and it won two audience awards at important film festivals. "People say they did not expect the atmosphere of the movie. You know, such different emotions - laughter, sadness, surprise. After laughter, there was a moment for reflection." Added Mateusz.



Film was recently premiered in Warsaw and it is pulling the crowd. It was like dream come true for both Mateusz and Anna. They wanted to take this documentary out of Poland.

Photo Courtesy: Robert Słusznia / KRK FILM

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