

## Arts &amp; Travel

# Film editor's documentary pays tribute to her mother

By RON CSILLAG  
Staff Reporter

**TORONTO** — Toronto film editor Valerie Weiss has ventured to the other side of the camera to write, produce, direct and edit her first independent documentary, *Timepiece*. Her protean talents have paid off handsomely, except for one irony: The film could have stood some more judicious editing.

*Timepiece*, which premiered June 3 at the National Film Board (150 John St.) is a dreamy, daring little film, barely an hour long, that is a study in juxtapositions. Weiss has recorded the oral Holocaust reminiscences of her mother, who includes the fate of her own parents. But instead of scripting all that over standard stock war-era footage, Weiss shows a collage of scratchy, 8-mm colour home movies taken by her vacationing parents and stark, black-and-white shots of her own modern-day Toronto.

It's a departure from what one might expect from a film whose script, at least, could have come straight out of an interview for Stephen Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History* project, which recorded thousands of survivor testimonies around the world.

In using visuals that stand in contrast to what we hear from her mother Susan Weiss, 35-year-old Valerie Weiss has created a disorienting atmosphere. The horrors of war-time Budapest we hear jar with grainy shots of happy people on a beach and shaky images of kids in a Toronto schoolyard. Past and

present blur as the horror stories reach a crescendo. The incongruity is furthered by some truly spooky music composed by Donald Quan.

Susan Balkany Weiss was a young girl when the Nazis invaded Hungary in the spring of 1944. Jews were quickly stripped of their rights. That she escaped deportation to Auschwitz was a miracle.

Because she was hidden in a Budapest apartment building, sound became important to her; the slightest stir could have aroused suspicions; heavy footsteps were cause for panic. Her daughter plays on that; each mention of a slamming door or discomfiting noise is accompanied by well-timed visuals that limn the sounds.

The film is also a daughter's tribute to her mother, an attempt to understand her mother's experiences. According to Valerie Weiss, it's also supposed to show how the Holocaust continues to affect her own life, although that's not readily apparent.

And after about 40 minutes, we get the message. The film could have been much tighter. It was, however, "the toughest editing job I've ever done," Weiss says. "But it also taught me a lot. The whole experience really humbled me."

Running as a motif throughout *Timepiece* is the filmmaker's grandfather's pocket watch, which she has inherited. Like the timepiece, the Holocaust too is an inheritance, something that can be passed down to future generations.

Weiss has regarded her birthright from a different angle, but with deference.



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