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Two Documentaries Films explore sexism, holocaust

Reviews by Lois Wadsworth

Two documentary films will have short runs in Eugene this week. *Rate It X* filmmakers Lucy Winer and Paula De Koenigsberg look into the professional sexism of men who reveal as much about themselves as about their attitudes toward the women they exploit—insightful, ironic, funny, and shocking. *We Were So Beloved* documents the German Jews who founded a community in Manhattan's Washington Heights before and after the Holocaust. Director Manfred Kirchheimer asks some tough questions about the meaning of forgiveness.

Rate It X

Rate It X is a tour of some of the most outrageous examples of American sexism in the 80's that you can imagine. There's the *Hustler* cartoonist who draws Chester The Molester waiting in the alley with a baseball bat to clobber the little girl walking down the sidewalk. We see him playing with his toddler daughter, oblivious to any connection between his "work" and his moral responsibility to his child.

There's the fundamentalist preacher who harks back to Eve as a "help-meet" of Adam, and the funeral parlor director whose solid oak caskets are for men and the pink, ruffled numbers are for women.

There's the underwear manufacturer who wants those women who burned their bras back in the 70's to buy his product, a baker who creates bikini-clad torso cakes (no head, puh-leez!), a toy salesman

with military box-toys and cosmetics and baby dolls for the girls, a guy whose restaurant logo is a headless woman (his place is called The Quiet Woman).

Some old veterans (in uniform) pontificate about boys playing with dolls and sentimentalize tomboys. A weirdo cable-TV freak called Ugly George gets women to take their clothes off for him on camera. The editor of an upscale black monthly magazine seems sincere in his respect for the individual women in his life but determined to keep the nudes in the centerfold.

Lucy Winer and Paula de Koenigsberg have put together an amazing collage of true stories that are stranger than fiction. The men they interview are incredibly candid and apparently completely unconscious of their sexism. The directors never intrude; they simply allow these fools to hang themselves on camera. The disarming, business-like manner with which Winer and de Koenigsberg approach their male subjects elicits subtle revelations the printed word cannot hope to capture. (At Cinema 7 from Fri., Jan. 30 through Mon., Feb. 2.)

We Were So Beloved

We Were So Beloved is a serious documentary about the effects of the Holocaust on those German Jews who settled in New York Washington Heights—the ones who got out during the 30's or survived the extermination camps during the war. It consists of interviews with the filmmaker's family, friends,

and neighbors, archival footage from Germany, excerpts from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and family photographs.

This is a very personal account. Filmmaker Manny Kirchheimer was brought to this country as a five-year-old in 1936. He considers himself very lucky. This film is really his quest for answers to those things which haunt the survivor. Would I have risked my life to save my Jewish neighbors? Can I forgive those who didn't? These are the thematic elements that make up Kirchheimer's film.

A few things stand out for me from the film, mostly the beautiful men, women, and children in the family photographs from pre-Hitlerian Germany. The fact was that German Jews were completely assimilated; they did not live in ghettos isolated from their neighbors; they thought of themselves as Germans rather than as Jews. And they didn't think it could happen there.

Kirchheimer asks some tough questions of the people he interviews; he does intrude himself into the process, not always with desired effects. The film could be shorter by an hour and better for it. Nevertheless, Kirchheimer gets ordinary people to talk about ethical and moral dilemmas of such complexity that no one of us can truly know how we would have faced them or what we would have done. *We Were So Beloved* is another addition to the growing body of works on the Holocaust, and as such, deserves serious attention lest we forget. (At Cinema 7, Tuesday through Thursday, Feb. 3-5.)

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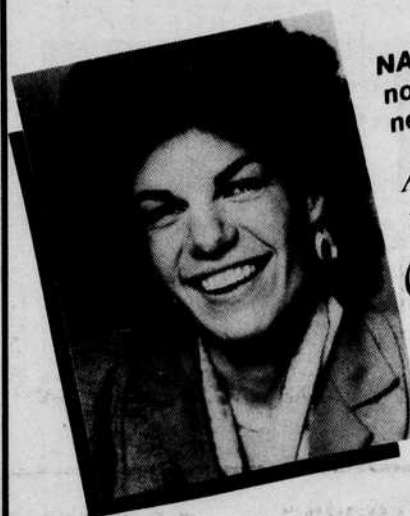
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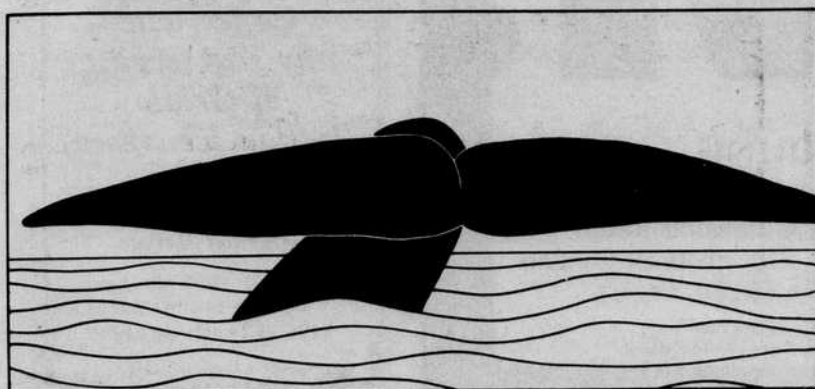
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