

BLESSED IS THE MATCH

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF HANNAH SENESH

DIRECTED BY
ROBERTA GROSSMAN

She was only 22 when she parachuted into Nazi-occupied Europe in an effort to save the Jews of her native Hungary. But poet and diarist Hannah Senesh had already left behind a body of work that would inspire readers for generations to come. This film, directed by Roberta Grossman and narrated by Joan Allen, has won numerous awards. With unprecedented access to the Senesh family archive, this powerful story unfolds through the writings and photographs of Hannah and Catherine Senesh.

Blessed is the Match is the first documentary feature about Hannah Senesh, Israel's national heroine. Safe inside Palestine in 1944, Hannah parachuted behind enemy lines in an attempt to help save the Jews of Hungary, among them, her beloved mother Catherine. Shockingly, it was the only outside rescue mission for Jews during the Shoah.



The Holocaust in Hungary

Soon after WWI, Admiral Miklos Horthy came to power in Hungary, ruling as regent for the crown. In principle, Horthy ruled in the name of the monarchy with a vacant throne. In reality, he was a dictator.

During WWII, Horthy allied Hungary with Germany. Hungary joined the Axis alliance in November 1940, declaring war on the Soviet Union in June 1941. Germany enticed and then rewarded Hungary with territory, which allowed it to expand. It received the Transcarpathian Ukraine and sections of southern Slovakia from Czechoslovakia (1938-39), northern Transylvania from Romania (1940), and the Backa region from Yugoslavia (1941).

According to a 1941 census, Hungary, including the annexed territories, had a Jewish population of about 825,000, which included 100,000 converts to Christianity whom, under race laws, were classified as Jews. Between 1938 and 1941, Hungary instituted antisemitic legislation resembling Germany's Nuremberg Laws. In 1939, Hungary drafted all adult Jewish men for forced-labor service brigades. About 40,000 Hungarian Jews died in labor-service brigades before the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944.

Horthy generally did not deport his country's Jews to German-held territory. However, about 20,000 Jews from the annexed territories were deported in July and August 1941. Recognizing the fact that Germany was losing the war, Horthy attempted to negotiate an armistice with the Allies. In response, German forces occupied Hungary in March 1944, preventing such an armistice from occurring. The following month, all Jews except those residing in Budapest were ordered into ghettos. Many of these "ghettos" were outdoors with no sanitary facilities. Deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau began the next month, in May 1944.

Of the more than 800,000 Jews living in Hungary, more than 60,000 were killed before the German occupation and almost 620,000 died or were deported or killed before the liberation in early 1945.

The Jews of Budapest

Hungary's capital, Budapest, straddles both banks of the Danube River and is the country's most populous city. The city of Budapest was created by the union of three cities: Buda, Obuda, and Pest.

Before WWII, approximately 200,000 Jews lived in the city, making it the center of Hungarian Jewish cultural life. In the late 1930s and 40s, Budapest remained a safe haven for Jewish refugees, primarily from Germany and Austria. In June 1944, the German occupiers ordered Budapest's Jews into designated buildings marked with Stars of David. In October 1944, Germany installed a new Hungarian government dominated by the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross. The reign of terror instituted by the Arrow Cross in Budapest resulted in the shooting deaths of more than 20,000 Jews whose bodies were dumped into the Danube.

Soviet forces liberated Budapest on February 13, 1945. More than 100,000 Jews remained in the city at liberation.

Hungarian Pinwheel Cookies from Barbara Lustig's Grandmother

4 ½ cups flour
1 whole egg and 2 egg yolks
3 Tablespoons sugar
2-3 cups milk (grandmother used evaporated milk and water)

Knead to make very soft dough. Divide into 4 balls.

1 ½ cups flour
1 ½ cups butter

Combine and make 4 balls.

Flatten first dough and place butter balls in center. Fold over to cover and make these into balls. Roll out as thin as possible. Fold, flour and refrigerate 3 hours.

Roll out again, smear with butter, fold and refrigerate 24 hours or more.

Heat oven to 425 degrees. Roll out dough very thin. Cut into even squares. Make a slice on each corner. Place apricot or strawberry jam in center of each. Pinch every other corner to make a pinwheel. Bake for @ 15 minutes or until light brown. "These are a lot of work, but well worth the effort." Barbara

BLESSED IS THE MATCH

Blessed is the match consumed

in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns

in the secret fastness of the heart.

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop

its beating for honor's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed

in kindling flame.

Sardice, Yugoslavia, May 2, 1944

Translated from the Hebrew by Marie Syrkin

A NOTE FROM THE JHSNV "KNESSET":

WE DEDICATE THIS PROGRAM TO OUR DEAR FRIEND AND KNESSET MEMBER, LOUISE PACKARD, z''l. LOUISE'S DEDICATION, INTELLIGENCE AND FRIENDSHIP WILL BE SORELY MISSED. MAY HER MEMORY BE FOR A BLESSING.

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