

Lifestyle

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Ed Mosberg in a tallit over the Mauthausen inmate uniform. Inset: director Claire Ferguson

A tale of pain and resilience

Director of Holocaust film tells Francine Wolfisz of 'honour' of working with survivor testimony

“When I listened to the testimony, I realised this was something you could never learn, you can only feel and hear it.”

Shutting herself away in a viewing room, director Claire Ferguson spent many hours intensely watching first-hand accounts of 12 Holocaust survivors, filmed over 14 years.

She had been approached by the producer, Llion Roberts, to compile their stories, and an interview with Mietek Pemper, Oskar Schindler's right-hand man, into a compelling narrative of the Holocaust, the result of which is *Destination Unknown*, released in cinemas tomorrow.



More than a decade ago, Roberts visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was moved by a photograph that reminded him of his daughter. When he later spoke about the experience with the son of a Holocaust survivor, he was motivated to find others and film their testimonies.

In the 400 hours of film he captured, Roberts discovered that some survivors had only begun talking in recent years. Some had never spoken, and for some, who have died since the making of the film, it would be their last opportunity to open up about a life marked by genocide.

“To have these testimonies and to be involved in this project was an absolute honour,” says Ferguson, who has previously worked on *Aileen: The Life and Death of a Serial Killer*, *The End of the Line* – about the effects of overfishing – and *Concert for George* – about the Beatle George Harrison. “The survivors shared these stories, which are very personal and intimate. It was not something I could walk away from. I was compelled to do it and knew it was so important those voices were heard,” she added.

She was struck by the unique stories from those who witnessed horrific brutality in the camps, those

who escaped, were kept in hiding or became partisan fighters.

For Ed Mosberg, who was liberated from Mauthausen, the pain he suffered at the hands of the Nazis still leaves an emotional scar more than 70 years later.

“You see this whip,” he passionately tells the crowd gathered at the concentration camp in Austria, clad in a striped uniform worn by inmates. “I was beaten by four men with this whip. I wished at that time I were dead, because those who are dead cannot feel it. I feel this, I feel this today. I never forgot this.”

Another former Mauthausen inmate, Marsha Kreuzman, is also haunted by her experience.

“I could forget what I had for breakfast this morning, but I will never forget what happened for the five and a half years in the concentration camp,” she says. “Who was better off? The one who dies early in the war, or the one who suffers so much for so many years? If you think I don't suffer now you're wrong. I don't sleep at night. “I walked on snow and I was



thinking I was walking on the stones. I was walking on dead people, on their bones.”

Helen Sternlicht, one of the 1,200 Jews rescued by Oskar Schindler, recalls the brutality she saw at the hands of Amon Goeth, commandant of Kraków-

Plaszów concentration camp, where she was interned. Speaking about the inmate she saw being “ripped apart” by one of Goeth's savage dogs, she says: “This scene is something that still causes so much horror in me.”

There were, however, those who witnessed great kindness in the face of such horror.

Eli Zborowski survived the war thanks to the bravery of Maria and Josef Placzek, who built a hiding place inside their home for his family.

“These people are angels, not human beings,” he reflects.

For Ferguson, the testimonies reveal not just the facts of what happened, but how the survivors moved forward with their lives. “On the surface, many have gone on to marry, have children and build successful careers. But the emotional

impact of their experience and their sense of guilt at having survived is all too apparent.” She adds: “You feel that survival guilt. One of the things this film gives us is a sense of living pain. It's not discussed or analysed, but you feel it in front of you.”

The director noted that some survivors openly talked to the camera in a way they felt they couldn't with their own families. Speaking on film, Stanley Glogover says: “I never spoke about it before because it was too painful to tell anyone you loved. Then the children were born, they grew up and never knew anything about what happened to me.

“Unfortunately, as much as I was hiding it from them, in later years I was very emotional, bringing back these bad memories.”

Ultimately, the film shows that they are all survivors, not just of the Nazis, but of life itself. “The pain will never go away, but they have managed to move on and live with that pain,” says Ferguson. “Their sense of hope in the face of all this is extraordinary and humbling.”

◆ **Destination Unknown (12A) is in cinemas from tomorrow. destinationunknownmovie.com**