



Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles
Serving the Los Angeles Jewish Community Since 1979

**“My Grandfather’s House: The Journey Home”
 Screening and Discussion with the Filmmakers
 Eileen Douglas and Ron Steinman**

Monday, September 19th, 7:00 PM, Skirball Cultural Center ([for directions](#))

New Policy: \$5:00 Charge for Guests at Meetings

This personal documentary follows Eileen Douglas’s determined search to find her grandfather’s house in Lithuania--the home he lived in and left behind in 1911 when he fled, at 16, from Kovno to America. Four decades after his death, with only fragments to guide the way, the documentary is Douglas’s attempt to lift the veil of darkness and discover "where it all began."



Eileen travels from New York City to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, to her mother’s attic in Syracuse, to the homes of relatives, and, finally, with her daughter at her side, to the block in Kovno where her grandfather once lived. Along the way she unexpectedly unlocks the mystery of stories he never told, discovers the fate of family members lost in the war, learns of the glory that once was Lithuanian Jewry, finds living relatives missing for years in Siberia, and resurrects a family shattered by the traumas of the 20th Century.

Eileen Douglas on the street where her grandfather lived in old town Kovno. PHOTO CREDIT: DOUGLAS/STEINMAN PRODUCTIONS

The documentary weaves together original footage, old family photographs, archival records, translations of old Yiddish letters, archival film footage, family reminiscences, interviews, conversations and music scored to evoke a vanished era. Before the screening, filmmaker Eileen Douglas will discuss the making of the documentary, and, in particular, what compelled this personal quest. The film will be followed by a Q & A with Douglas, co-producer/director Ron Steinman, and Douglas’ daughter Rachel Zients, of Los Angeles, who also appears in the documentary. **Eileen Douglas** is a broadcast journalist turned documentary filmmaker. Before co-founding Douglas/Steinman Productions with producing partner Ron Steinman in 1996, she worked as a correspondent for ABC-TV’s Lifetime Magazine, following nearly 18 years at all-news WINS Radio in New York. Before moving to New York in 1975, she was an anchor/reporter and then one

of the country's first women news directors at WKLO Radio in Louisville, and co-host producer of "NOW", a TV show at WHAS. She began her career in her hometown Syracuse as a newspaper and television reporter and is also the author of two books, including "Rachel and the Upside Down Heart". Douglas and Steinman are also producers of the documentary "Luboml: My Heart Remembers" which aired on public television in New York and is distributed by Cinema Guild. **Ron Steinman, director and co-producer of My Grandfather's House**, began his career at 23 at NBC News and spent 35 years at the network. Producing and writing for the Huntley Brinkley Report, Chet Huntley Reports, documentaries, and live specials, before being named NBC's Bureau Chief in Saigon during the Vietnam War. He also served as Bureau Chief in Hong Kong and London before returning to New York to oversee the network's news specials. In 1975 he joined the Today Show, spending 11 years in a number of senior producing positions. During the 1990's as a freelance producer for ABC, he wrote and produced a dozen A&E Biographies and Lifetime Intimate Portraits as well as award-winning documentaries for The Learning Channel and programs for Discovery and the History Channel. He is the author of the books, "The Soldiers' Story", "Women in Vietnam" and "Inside Television's First War: A Saigon Journal". Steinman has won a Peabody Award, a National Press Club award, two American Women in Radio & Television Awards, and been nominated for five Emmys. He is a contributor to the web magazine Digital Journalist and executive editor of webzine Digital Filmmaker. **Rachel Zients, Eileen's daughter who appears in the film**, lives in Los Angeles. She works as a television producer and is a freelance writer. She has worked on UPN's Blind Date and for E! Entertainment Television. Her work has appeared in several publications, including Backstage West and The Los Angeles Times Magazine. Following in her mother's footsteps of investigating family, she is currently working on her own project, a book about parent loss. She is proud of everything her mother has accomplished with this film, both personally and professionally.

For information on MY GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE, for purchase or screenings, please call The Cinema Guild at (800) 723-5522 or send an email to orders@cinemaguild.com.

Reviews and Video Clip from Film:

1) From Here To Kovno

For Upper West Side documentary filmmaker, search for grandfather's house leads to family revelations.



Susan Josephs - Staff Writer

Reprinted from The Jewish Week (12/29/2000)

As a child growing up in Syracuse, Eileen Douglas lived for the moments she could climb into her grandfather's lap and find the pennies he brought, special for her. A kosher butcher, her grandfather faithfully visited his grandchildren every day after work. On Friday night, his grandchildren would go to his house for Shabbos dinner.

Eileen's grandfather, Sam Nadel, 16, and his father, Chaim Nadel, Kovno, Lithuania, 1811.

Though Douglas adored her grandfather, she knew very little about his upbringing in Kovno, Lithuania. "I thought we weren't allowed to talk about



it, that if you did, you would hurt the family," she recalls.

Some 25 years after her grandfather died, Douglas paid a visit to her childhood home and stumbled upon a series of forgotten family photographs. "These were people I'd never seen before. They dressed well, like they were from a city," recalls Douglas, who imagined her ancestors as "shtetl peasants. I was shocked. ... They shattered my identity. How could it be that I did not know my own story?"

It would be another 15 years before Douglas found herself knee-deep in passenger ship records, census counts and "The Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto" as she searched for family roots. Finally, as a woman in her 50s, Douglas learned how her grandfather escaped conscription into the czar's army by fleeing to America. Two years later, his brother Max followed. She discovered how other relatives got herded into the Kovno Ghetto and how her great-grandmother Chaya had the good fortune to die of natural causes.

A broadcast journalist who spent her life telling the stories of other people, Douglas decided to apply years of professional expertise to her own personal history. The resulting documentary, "My Grandfather's House," records a family saga that many Jews will find familiar yet manages to remain fresh and poignant.

"It's a compellingly made, tightly woven story," says Ken Sherman, the director of film and media at Makor, who has viewed the documentary. "It's not an unfamiliar story but it has an emotional kick."

Currently under consideration at PBS, "My Grandfather's House" had been initially screened as part of the prestigious "No Borders" section of the Independent Feature Film Market. The film, written and narrated by Douglas, unfolds like a personal diary as it chronicles the events that lead to the filmmaker's trip to Kovno, where accompanied by her adult daughter, she searches for the home where her grandfather lived. "I leave New York, not even sure I have the right address. I don't know what possesses me," her voice narrates as the viewer watches her first cry in a taxi on the way to the airport and later, at the grave of her great-grandmother in Kovno.

Kneeling in a lush, green cemetery, bearing stones that relatives gave her to place on this ancestral grave, Douglas finally knows where her grandfather comes from and "where I come from. More importantly, I know who you loved ... I'm not in the dark anymore."

In the Upper West Side office she shares with her business partner Ron Steinman, the now-54-year-old Douglas, a youthful looking, contemplative woman with large, soulful eyes, attempts to address the issue of possession. "I'm a reporter, I don't like mysteries," she first says. Then, she delves further into the question of motivation. "My grandfather died suddenly when I was 12 and I never got to say goodbye. He was the first death I experienced. Afterwards, I saw our family shrink."

The detective work involved in making the film put Douglas in touch with over 30 family members in North America, Russia and Israel that she either never met or had not heard from in years. "I went looking for a house but instead wound up with all these relatives," observes Douglas, whose grandfather's house had been torn down. "That's the most important thing, that I've got my family back, both living and dead."



Filmmaker Eileen Douglas, and her daughter Rachel Zients search for roots in Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, in her documentary, **My Grandfather's House**. Rachel Zients, Douglas' 29-year-old daughter who lives in Los Angeles, admits that while she "was not the easiest person to travel with" to Eastern Europe, she never thought twice when her mother asked if she would accompany her to Kovno. "For some reason, my mother needed to go there and wherever she goes, I go," she says. "My mother was widowed at a young age and we spent so much time equating family with just the two of us. It's so ironic that we have family all over the world now."

The 66-year-old Steinman, a veteran news producer for NBC and ABC who co-produced "My Grandfather House," views his partner's quest as "reversing the breaking of the glass, of restoring a family to one piece. At first, I didn't believe in the project," he says. "I didn't know much about my own family but it wasn't an issue for me. But then Eileen started feeding me all this archival material and I saw a subtext. I also saw how passionate she was about her own story and I thought, 'if you have these things going for you, then you can't miss.' "

After working together on several projects for ABC-TV's Lifetime Magazine, Douglas and Steinman decided to form their own production company and shoot documentaries that would focus on personal histories and character studies. "I've done enough global stories in my life," says Steinman.

Working with Douglas on "My Grandfather House" has inspired Steinman to interview his 91-year-old mother about his own family. "Before, I had never cared to ask how my mother's father had fled Odessa," he says. "Now, I'm learning things I never knew and my mother is opening up."

For Steinman, who grew up in the 1950s among relatives "who did not talk," making the documentary has led to a similar discovery of "aunts and cousins with wonderful stories to tell. It has also made me feel so proud to be Jewish," he says. "As a kid, I never experienced overt anti-Semitism but my family's way was not to let people know we were Jewish until it seemed OK to do so."

Douglas says, "I feel exceedingly fulfilled. There are no more unanswered questions or unresolved good-byes. There's a closure I'm grateful to have."

2) Film Clip of Eileen Douglas working on My Grandfather's House:

http://www.ushmm.org/museum/publicprograms/programs/films02/grandfather_film.htm

3) **Don't Give Up Your Day Job**, November 2004 by Ron Steinman in *The Digital Journalist*:

An interesting piece about the making of this documentary. Link to this article:

<http://dirckhalstead.org/issue0411/steinman.html>

4) "Wonderful! The story has such narrative drive that we're quickly engaged. A wise and heartwarming movie." ---Jan Lisa Huttner, World Jewish Digest

"This is the most moving, beautifully produced personal memoir of a second generation that I have ever seen."-Dr. William Shulman, President of the Holocaust Resource Center and Archives."While watching the film, it brought me back to conversations I had with my grandparents about life in Europe before the war. It touched my heart and memories of my youth." --Rhonda Barad, Simon Wiesenthal Center, NYC"I eagerly followed every step of Eileen's "detective" work and I was quite moved by the end. I had no idea there was so much information out there waiting to be uncovered--I was amazed to see the detailed records held in Lithuania. Compared to Eileen, I'm shockingly uninformed about my own similar family history--my grandparents didn't talk about the old country much more that did Eileen's grandfather. But I'm newly inspired to debrief my relatives while I still can." -Gary Kass, University of Missouri PressJGS of Washington DC audience: "I forgot to bring tissues and there was not a dry eye in the house like so many of us who have been "bitten" by the genealogy bug, Eileen Douglas has asked questions, interviewed family, and searched documents. Unlike most of us, she used her skills as a filmmaker to create a lasting memorial to her grandfather and other ancestors." --Marlene Bishow, JGS of Great Washington"Adored it. A beautiful example of what we could do, research-wise."

"The film was uplifting to say the very least. Your tenacity and love for your family will be always with you. I will remember your film as a wonderful experience. Shalom!"

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