

INSIDE HANA'S SUITCASE

Directed by Larry Weinstein. Written by Thomas Wallner, based on Karen Levine's book. PG. 88 min.

Toronto filmmaker Larry Weinstein's deft, unique balance of documentary and narrative techniques helps preserve and convey the combination of deep personal trauma and epic atrocity at the heart of *Inside Hana's Suitcase*. Yet this World War II Holocaust tale belongs most to the girl who haunts its every frame, its title, and the psyche of the brother who survived the Auschwitz hellfire that consumed her. That we come away with such empathy for Hana Brady and her brother George is testament to her vivid ghost, his openness and the detective work that went into finding them both.

Inside Hana's Suitcase investigates the details behind the noted 2002 book *Hana's Suitcase*. A series of coincidences, retraced by Weinstein, leads Fumiko Ishioka, director of the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Centre, to acquire a Czech Jewish girl's suitcase, retrieved from a Nazi death camp over 60 years earlier and preserved as part of a Holocaust memorial. The only available details are painted on the case: Hana Brady was born May 16, 1931; she was, by the time of her wartime capture, an orphan. Curiosity turns to emotional investment as Ishioka researches Hana's fate, which in turn leads her to George (b. 1928), now a thriving granddad in Toronto.

Weinstein uses footage of Ishioka going about her work and interviews with George and surviving friends and family and contrasts them with beautiful, sepia-toned re-enactment footage of Hana and George as children. The effect isn't unlike splicing an episode of *The Fifth Estate* with a Guy Maddin film; whenever the retelling starts to feel remotely clinical, doc shifts to drama with a spectral vision perfectly gauged to the subject. The director's trick of using schoolchildren in Toronto, Tokyo and the Bradys' hometown in Moravia to synopsise the book in their own words is as crucial as George's willingness to reveal the weight of his survival guilt. *Inside Hana's Suitcase* is a lovely, accessible and moving work that captures the micro and macro in ideal measure.