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**“STEAL A PENCIL FOR ME”**  
**Premieres**  
**Tuesday, May 26, 2009**  
**on the Emmy Award–Winning PBS Series *Independent Lens***

*“I’m a very special Holocaust survivor. I was in the camps with my wife  
and my girlfriend, and believe me, it wasn’t easy.”*  
– Jack Polak, “*Steal A Pencil For Me*”

(San Francisco, CA) — If anyone ever wanted proof of the power of the human spirit, **STEAL A PENCIL FOR ME** is it. Directed and produced by Academy Award® nominee Michèle Ohayon, **STEAL A PENCIL FOR ME** is a transcendent story of hope and a love that survives even genocide. Following its critically acclaimed theatrical release, the film will have its television premiere on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, May 26, 2009 at 10:00 pm (check local listings).

Seamlessly weaving together past and the present, Ohayon masterfully brings to life the story of Jack, an unassuming, married accountant, and Ina, the 20-year old beauty who steals his heart. Their love story starts in a transit camp in Holland, survives through their time in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and ends up in Westchester NY, where the film captures them celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.



*Scenes from STEAL A PENCIL FOR ME, coming to Independent Lens May 2009.*

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June 1943, Nazi-occupied Holland: In Amsterdam, Jack Polak first meets Ina Soep at a birthday party and is instantly smitten. But Jack's pursuit of love is complicated: He is poor and unhappily married to Manja, a flirtatious and mercurial spouse.

September 1943: Dutch Jews are deported to Westerbork, where Jack, his wife Manja and his love Ina find themselves living in the same barracks.

Under these highly improbable circumstances, Jack courts Ina, his love at first sight, and his persistence and optimism win her heart. They find ways to see each other clandestinely, and thus begins a love affair that will last forever.

When Manja, Jack's wife, despite their difficult and unhappy marriage, objects strongly to the relationship, Ina and Jack resort to writing secret love letters, years later published in a book. Through words of passion and dreams of the future, they encourage each other to stay alive. Every day brings them one step closer to Liberation.

Among death and disease, hard labor and fights over food, the two lovers hang on to their courtship. And when Ina falls ill, it is Manja who gives up her bread so that she might eat to regain her strength.

When filmmaker Ohayon first heard about Jack and Ina from their daughter Margrit, she immediately read the love letters and was intensely moved by the every-day human details not found in holocaust history books. Ohayon knew she had to make a film about this incredible and unlikely intimate story. "The notion that even under these horrendous circumstances there was still love, jealousy and passion proves that the human spirit cannot be easily broken, that one's will-power to survive and the strength of love is immeasurable—in life and in death," Says the filmmaker.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **STEAL A PENCIL FOR ME** at [pbs.org/independentlens/stealapencilforme](http://pbs.org/independentlens/stealapencilforme). Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmakers and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

## **About the Filmmakers**

### **Michèle Ohayon (Director, Producer)**

Michèle Ohayon is an award winning director, writer and producer. Born in Casablanca and raised in Israel, Michèle graduated from Tel Aviv University (Film & Television). In 1984, she received the Israeli Best Film Award for *Pressure*, one of the first dramatic films on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 1987, she moved to Los Angeles, where she directed a succession of critically acclaimed dramatic and documentary features. The award-winning feature length documentary *It Was a Wonderful Life* explores the plight of upper middle-class women who live out of their cars and become the "hidden homeless." Narrated by Jodie Foster with music by Melissa Etheridge, the film aired nationally on PBS and OXYGEN. *It Was a Wonderful Life* won the Gold Award at the Houston Film Festival and an IDA nomination.

Ohayon completed *Colors Straight Up*, a second feature length documentary, in 1997. This film received nominations for the 1997 Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature, the DGA's Outstanding Directorial Achievement and the IFP Spirit Award. It also received the Golden Spire Award for the Arts at the San Francisco International Film Festival, as well as 11 national awards. *Colors Straight Up* aired on PBS and all over the world.

In 2005 Ohayon completed the documentary-comedy *Cowboy del Amor*, which garnered a WGA and IDA nomination. It won both Jury and Audience Awards at the SXSW festival, as well as Best documentary at Santa Fe, Durango and Cinefest.

Ohayon has also produced and directed commercials, episodic television and music videos. For her body of work, Ohayon received the 1996 and the 1998 Artist's Grant from the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and was recognized for her fiction writing in the Chesterfield Writing Competition 2000. Ohayon is a founding board member of Cinewomen, a member of the Academy Of Motion Pictures, Producers Guild and the Writers Guild of America. Her goal as filmmaker is to tell good, truthful stories about real people and to make films that open hearts and minds. Michèle Ohayon's is in post-production on new film about National Security as told through the eyes of Richard Clarke.

### **ABOUT *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen. Further information about the series is available at [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens).

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