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For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom

For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/blessed-is-the-match

***BLESSED IS THE MATCH IS
THE INSPIRING STORY OF HANNAH SENESH,
A WORLD WAR II RESISTANCE FIGHTER AND MODERN-DAY JOAN OF ARC
THE FILM PREMIERES TUESDAY, APRIL 13 AT 10 PM
ON THE PBS SERIES INDEPENDENT LENS***

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.

- Hannah Senesh, days before her capture by the Nazis

(San Francisco, CA) — Hannah Senesh was only 22 when she parachuted into Nazi-occupied Europe in an effort to save the Jews of Hungary, but she had already left behind a body of literary work consisting of poems and diaries that would inspire readers for generations to come. Narrated by Academy Award® nominee Joan Allen, *Blessed is the Match* is the first feature documentary to bring to life this remarkable Holocaust heroine through interviews, eyewitness accounts, rare family photographs, dramatic re-creations, and the writings of Hannah and her mother Catherine Senesh. The film retraces Hannah's perilous mission, reconstructs her defiant months in a Gestapo prison during the summer of 1944, and looks back on the life of a talented and complex girl who came of age in a world descending into madness.

Underneath the dramatic events of Hannah's life story lies the bedrock of the devoted love between a mother and daughter, who would each, in turn, try to save the other. Directed, written, and produced by Roberta Grossman, *Blessed is the Match* will premiere on Tuesday, April 13 at 10 P.M. (check local listings) on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Maggie Gyllenhaal.



Scenes from Blessed is the Match, coming to Independent Lens April 2010.

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In 1944, Hannah Senesh, an emigrant to British-controlled Palestine, joined a mission to rescue Jews — including her mother — trapped in her native Hungary. Shockingly, it was the only military rescue mission for Jews during the Holocaust. Hannah parachuted behind enemy lines, was captured, tortured, and ultimately executed. Incredibly, her mother Catherine witnessed the entire ordeal — first as a prisoner with Hannah and later as her advocate, braving the bombed-out streets of Budapest in a desperate attempt to save her daughter.

While Hannah Senesh is a figure of great renown in Israel, she is largely unknown in the rest of the world. The filmmakers interviewed the few remaining survivors who knew Hannah — her classmates at a girls' school in Budapest, her fellow kibbutz members in Palestine, and prisoners from Hannah's time in a Gestapo jail in the summer of 1944. The filmmakers were also given unprecedented access to the Senesh family archive, including hundreds of unpublished letters and over 1,300 never-before-seen photos of remarkable quality.

Blessed is the Match honors Hannah's legacy, and captures her motivations. It also illuminates her faults as well as her strengths, in an effort to explain why she chose to act against such monolithic evil. "I first read Hannah's diary in junior high and was captivated by her courage and touched by her vulnerability," says director Roberta Grossman. "Later, as a history student at UC Berkeley, where I wrote my senior thesis on the Nazi SS, Hannah's story continued to inspire me. Why? She fought back. She chose to act by joining a noble, against-all-odds mission. Yet, by the time I had the opportunity to make the film years later, I was a mother, closer in age to Hannah's mother Catherine than to Hannah. Heroines are hard to relate to, but a mother who had to watch her brilliant, strong-willed daughter make choices that would ultimately cost her life, *that* is something gripping and universal."

To learn more about the film and its subjects, visit the companion website for *Blessed is the Match* at pbs.org/blessed-is-the-match. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

On April 13, *Blessed is the Match* will be available on DVD from Docurama Films, with bonus material including deleted scenes/interviews, behind-the-scenes photo gallery and theatrical trailer.

Onscreen Participants

Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz is the chair of the graduate program in contemporary Jewry and teaches in the department of Jewish history at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel.

The former director of the United States Holocaust Museum Research Institute and president of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, **Michael Berenbaum** is a leading expert on the Holocaust, who lectures widely throughout the United States and on four continents.

Recently deceased, **Reuven Dafne** was one of the last surviving members of the volunteer group of Jewish-Palestinians who joined the British military in a mission to rescue Jews in the Balkans.

Sir Martin Gilbert is Winston Churchill's official biographer, and the author of 81 books on twentieth-century history.

Peter Hay is a writer and historian and author of *Ordinary Heroes: The Life and Death of Chana Szenes*.

László Ritter, historian, is a research fellow at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

David Senesh is the nephew of Hannah Senesh and the son of Giora Senesh.

Eitan Senesh is the nephew of Hannah Senesh, the son of Giora Senesh and the chairman of the Hannah Senesh Legacy Foundation.

About the Filmmakers

Roberta Grossman, director/producer is an award-winning filmmaker with a passion for history and social justice. She has written and produced more than 40 hours of documentary television. She was the series producer and co-writer of *500 Nations*, the eight-hour CBS miniseries on Native Americans hosted by Kevin Costner. Grossman's feature documentary, *Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action*, premiered in 2005, and has screened and won awards at more than 40 festivals worldwide. Other writing and producing credits include *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, a four-hour special for the History Channel; *Hollywood & Power: Women on Top*, a special for AMC; *The Rich in America: 150 Years of Town and Country Magazine* for A&E; *The History of Christianity: The First Thousand Years*, a four-hour special on A&E; *Medal of Honor*, a six-part television series produced for *U.S. News & World Report*; and *Heroines of the Hebrew Bible* and *Judas* for the A&E series *Mysteries of the Bible*.

Marta Kauffman, executive producer, co-created and executive produced the Emmy® Award-winning series *Friends*. Previously, Kauffman co-created and served as executive producer on the critically acclaimed series *Dream On*. While working on *Dream On*, she received an Emmy® Award nomination and a CableAce Award. Kauffman also co-created the comedy series *The Powers That Be* for Norman Lear. Most recently, she served as executive producer on the one-hour drama *Related* for the WB and co-created and served as executive producer on the comedy series *Family Album*, and on *Veronica's Closet*, starring Kirstie Alley. In addition, she served as an executive producer on the series *Jesse*, starring Christina Applegate. A Philadelphia native, Kauffman began her writing career at Brandeis University, where she met her then writing partner of over 25 years, David Crane. Kauffman serves on the Board of Trustees of Oakwood School in Los Angeles and has been named one of the 25 Most Influential Mothers by *Working Mother Magazine*.

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 the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *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.

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