

Hardship, Hope, and Healing --All in a One Beautiful Film.

A movie review by Robin Riback

The documentary film *Second Chances* presents Amalia Sandberg and Izydor Mesner's raw and touching accounts of their dangerous escapes from their homes as they flee through World War II war-torn Europe. Their vivid memories are reinforced by beautiful and harrowing graphite pencil animation created by Canadian film director and visual artist Farzin Farzaneh.

The film begins with close-ups of the now elderly Sandberg and Mesner telling us, "I was born in a little town in Poland." Amalia remembers the first part of her life as a child in an idyllic seaside town where the Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian people live in harmony. Izydor Mesner, the youngest child of four siblings has a similar experience, living an insular and peaceful life in his hometown.

Izydor and Amalia's journeys into danger begin when fascism and communism take hold in the 1930's. As antisemitism rises, their lives devolve into constant danger. To save their lives, they must flee, hide, and sometimes blend into various European communities. It is only many years later when they escape and immigrate to Montreal, Canada, that they are again safe.

To make the unbearable bearable, the survivors speak of the unspeakable in a conversational tone. And so, Farzin Farzaneh's chalk animation brings deep emotion and new life to Amalia and Izydor's matter-of-fact retelling of their anguished former lives. Farzin's sweeping black graphite pencil over a white background becomes our tour guide, taking us from safety to danger and finally back again to a fulfilling life. The illustrations and movement, like the stories' details, are both frightening and beautiful.

The compelling music by Sandra Chechik is an audible presence from Amalia and Izydor's first sentence to their safe homecoming in Canada. We are accompanied through good and bad times by staccato piano that sometimes feels like a Nazi goose march and at other points in the narrative it sounds like a hopeful forward march. With the added sorrowful long notes of stringed musical instruments, we can hear their despair.

But *Second Chances* is not about despair. Again and again, Amalia and Izydor's hopelessness and helplessness are replaced with their dreams and hopes for a better future. Although, at the film's conclusion, Izydor expresses his worry for future generations. A reemergence of hate and violence has him very worried, and so it should.

This film is a cautionary tale—The stories, animation, and music that reflect endangered lives over a century ago are eerily familiar today. But *Second Chances* is also about nurturing hope through acts of kindness. And so now we must decide—As we recover from pandemic uncertainty, will we continue to replace fear with hate or can we step back and realize that unity, acts of kindness, and eternal hope are *our* second chances?

Links to Robin Riback's writing: <https://rriback7k.medium.com/>
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