

a fragile future

by philip jackson

Before the Holocaust, the Jews of Eastern Europe had a rich and flourishing culture. The future of those who survived is now in jeopardy: three filmmakers who have witnessed what remains, hope their film will help to change that.

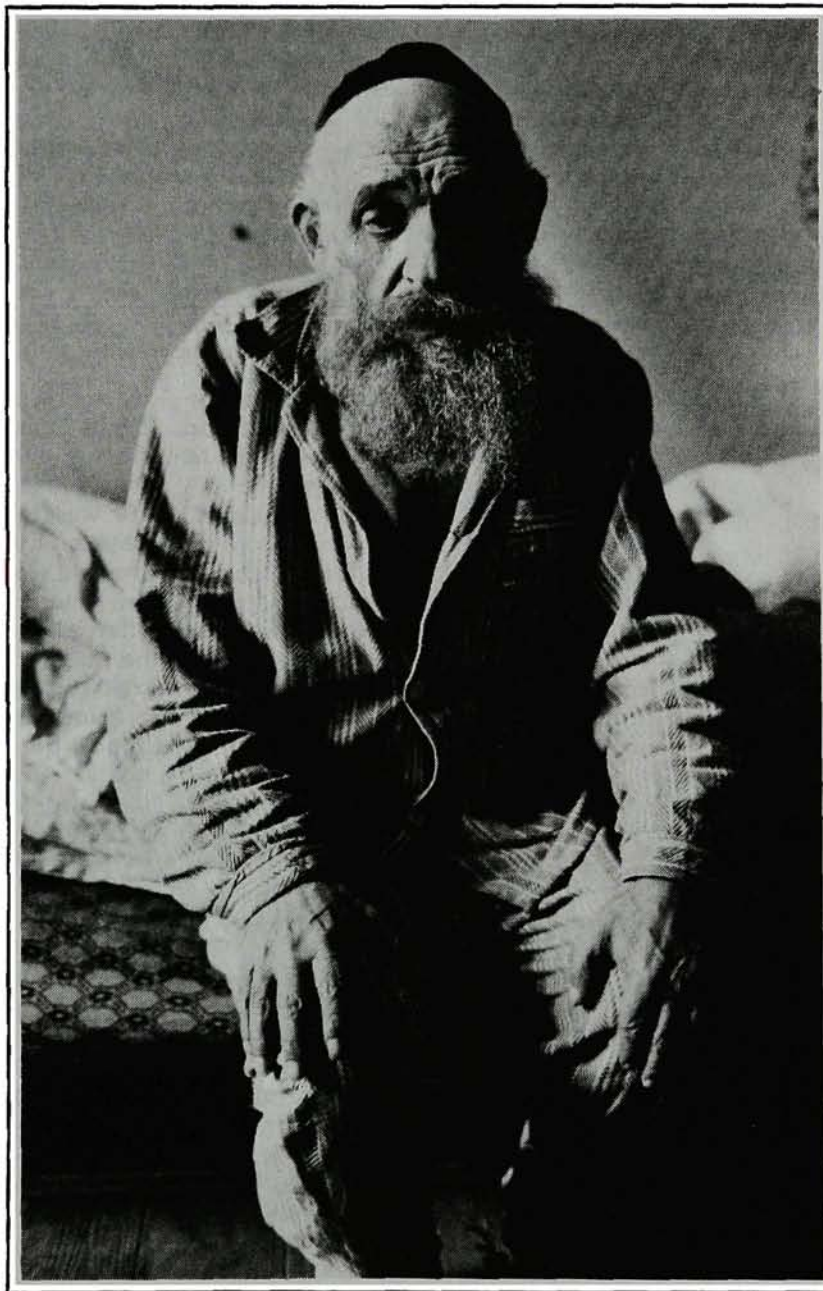


photo: Bob Stewart

An ailing Rabbi Moishe Szapiro — one of the three ritual slaughterers in all of Poland

"People ask us, 'did you get everything you wanted?' I think we got more." Jeff Cipin is talking about Horizon Film Productions' **Generation to Generation**, an hour-long TV documentary — and an ambitious undertaking. Shot throughout much of Eastern Europe in the summer of '79, it concerns the remaining enclaves of Jewish communities in that part of the world.

The film is directed by Rebecca Rotenberg (a partner in Horizon with Cipin). "It is not a film primarily concerned with the Holocaust," she emphasizes. "It is concerned with what remains."

The realization of **Generation to Generation** followed a long period of incubation and research in Toronto, and a month-long, fact-finding, pre-production tour by director Rotenberg. Cinematographer Bob Stewart (who shared the camerawork with Cipin) describes the production as something of a logistical and administrative miracle.

Production began in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and moved through Poland and Hungary in the twenty-seven days (nineteen shooting days) of production. The crew was always in the watchful presence of someone from state television (whom, of course, the producers had to pay).



photo: Bob Stewart

A friend accompanies Nachum Sivjak (right) in singing Jewish sabbath melodies after daily minyan in the only remaining synagogue in Warsaw, Poland

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Essentially, Cipin was responsible for filming the interviews, and Stewart, for recording the locales; "Giving them a sense of time and place," he says.

A total of 27,000 feet of film was shot; 7,500 feet of it as interview footage. Ultimately, the film will be structured around the interviews, with a narrator paraphrasing the translation in order to condense the vast amount of material. The producers' approach to the film was to treat the many dispersed Jewish communities as one. The production was an emotional experience for all. "The film can't be separated from our personal interest in the people there," says Cipin. "The most rewarding experience was to talk to other people in Hebrew — people you would normally consider as strangers aren't strangers at all. . ."

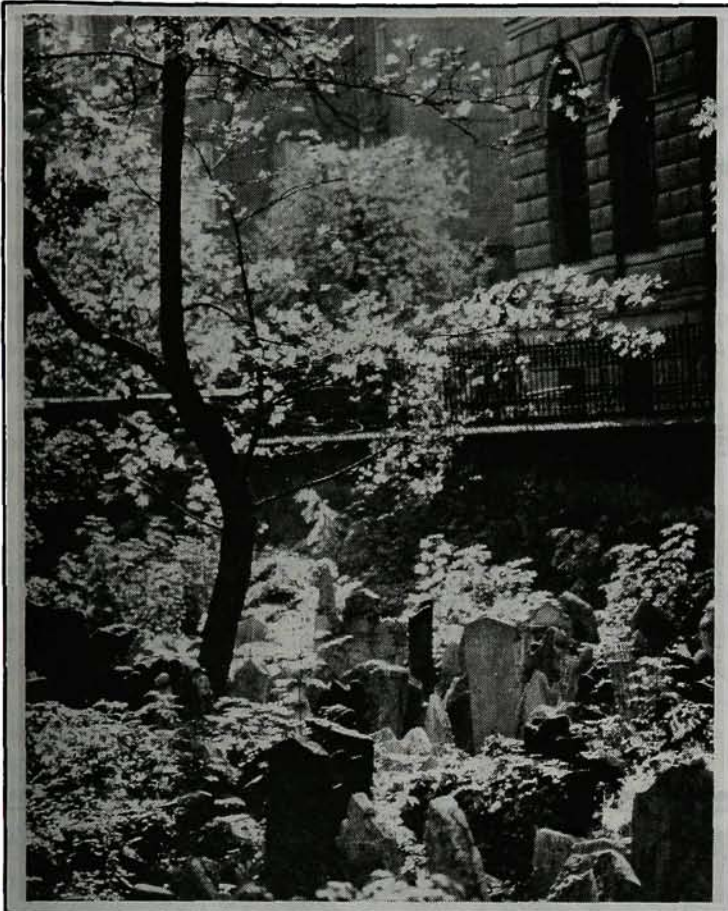
The producers define the common bond between the once populous and thriving communities as the simple fact that they were destroyed by the Holocaust. "What," asks Rotenberg, "will guarantee a continuity of the community? The greatest fear," she affirms "is being forgotten — they want their story told."

Stewart, who laughingly refers to himself as the "token wasp" on the crew was also evidently moved by the experience. He describes with emotion the filming of a decaying Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Lodz, Poland; which was overrun

by weeds, and characterized by broken headstones, because literally, there was no one left to take care of it. For Stewart, the trip was full of conflicting impressions. He was torn by the contrast between Eastern Europe's beauty — particularly the "old world" towns and villages — and the general sense of oppression which he affirms is real: "Everything is measured," he says. "It's so obvious, it's in the air. I tried to catch that on film."

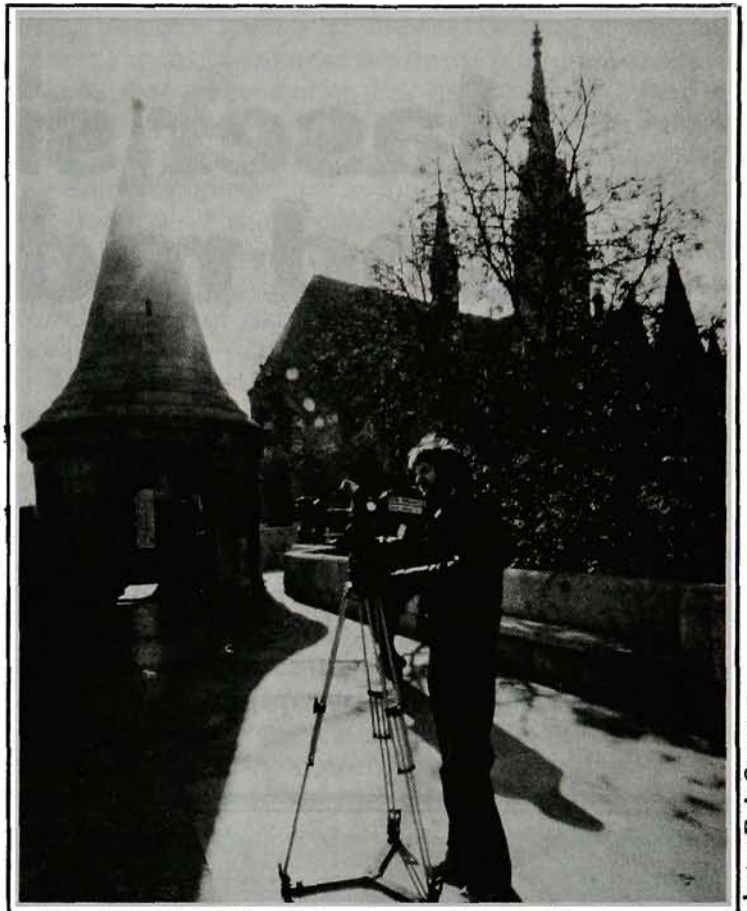
Generation to Generation is presently in post-production; the producers envisage an August '80 release. Horizon had to raise funds beyond the original \$90,000 of private money required, so as to see it through to completion. For the moment they are still dealing with the difficult task of editing the enormous amount of diverse footage they brought back with them. Cipin and Rotenberg's purpose was to "consider the problems facing the vanishing Jews of Eastern Europe" by "memorializing and documenting the remains of a rich and fascinating past." Their synopsis concludes with the following hope: "It will remain the challenge of those who are in a position to apply solutions and alternatives to act positively before it is too late."

Philip Jackson, filmmaker and owner of Lightscape Films, is currently working as a news editor at the CBC in Toronto.



The old Jewish Cemetery of Prague consists of ten layers of graves, one on top of the other, with an estimated 12,000 people buried in 12 acres

photo: Bob Stewart



Bob Stewart filming a panorama of the city from the castle in Budapest, Hungary

photo: Bob Stewart



Auschwitz, Poland in 1979: a grim reminder

photo: Bob Stewart