

I Cannot Be a Bystander

A documentary film by Jennifer A Reinish



I Cannot Be a Bystander

Logline

With identity-based hate on the rise, Holocaust survivors challenge us to become a nation of upstanders, taking action to safeguard one another and our democracy.



Synopsis

With antisemitism and other identity-based hate on the rise in the United States, we must not become a nation of bystanders. Holocaust survivors, members of targeted communities, civic and religious leaders, students and scholars challenge us to ask ourselves, “what is my role in building a safer and more inclusive world?” and they inspire us to find our voice.

Recently, antisemitism and hate have stepped out of the shadows and into the everyday rhetoric of some of the most powerful figures in the United States and the world. The parallels are all too clear: the normalization of bigotry that we see today recalls the targeted hate that spread across pre-war Europe less than a century ago. Those who have survived the violence that hatred can lead to are ringing the alarm bells: we all must act, before it is too late.



“I Cannot Be a Bystander” weaves the recollections of Holocaust survivors through an exploration of where hate comes from, the impact hate has had on so many individuals and communities, and how we can safeguard one another and our democracy.

The film opens with the voices of those survivors under images of current events that eerily resemble the survivors’ experiences 75 years ago. Next, it briefly explores antisemitism and how/why it is a precursor to other hatreds; and it will grapple with the question, ‘what is hate?’ The film will then focus on current events, why hate is on the rise, and how to recognize early warning signs of influence by hate groups—and how this impacts democracy. The survivors and members of other targeted groups share their reactions to this rising tide of hate, and how it is affecting them and their communities. Scholars, a wide range of religious, community and civic leaders, and well-known inspirational public figures share their thoughts and expertise. They relay deeply personal stories and give examples of what each of us can do to combat hate and violence and stand together as allies. As the film nears its conclusion, we present a call to action – steps everyone can and must take to counteract hate, like speaking up against divisive or discriminatory language, writing letters, or the quiet yet powerful act of voting. The film concludes with children sharing their ideas and perceptions of kindness and inclusivity, messages which echo the words of the survivors.

“I Cannot Be a Bystander” centers around upstanders, members of targeted groups who refuse to be silent, and their allies. But the audience is also a subject of this film– regular people, like you and me– discovering our power and using our voices. To go even deeper and help viewers understand that they themselves are *part* of the story, we are working with a world-class animator to design an ‘everyperson’ avatar who interacts with the story: listening, processing, and taking decisive action to make a difference.

Taking inspiration from the Holocaust survivors and others who are putting their convictions into action, this film delves into the moral and practical reasons why none of us can be bystanders.

This will be a feature film with an anticipated runtime of about 90 minutes.

Director's Vision / About the Film



I have had the opportunity over my career to film the stories of dozens of Holocaust survivors in my community, with two of my previous films (Margaret Singer: Seeking Light, and We Played Marbles) centering on survivors. It was with these previous projects in mind, that I had been following what felt like a very vocal and public rise in antisemitism over the past several years, including in my own community of Santa Barbara.

On December 2, 2022 Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff posted a tweet about the pain caused by antisemitism and hate. I responded to his tweet, thanking him and sharing that as a Jewish woman who has documented the stories of dozens of local survivors in my community, the rise in antisemitism is scary. Scary because of what the survivors must be thinking, and because of what it could lead to. Someone responded, tweeting at me: "You belong in an oven." I was frozen in place. I was raised Jewish, but am not observant and never once had I been the target of direct antisemitism. Once I processed that hateful message, I knew I had to do something. I decided to make a film.

I began by interviewing local Holocaust survivors to ask what they remembered from their childhoods as the Nazis rose to power and what parallels they saw between then and today. I wanted them to share the urgency of speaking out with the viewers of the film. What I did not expect was that every survivor I spoke with highlighted all the other hate we are witnessing in our country and across the globe. LGBTQ+, AAPI, Black, Muslim, immigrant groups being targeted. They all had personal stories of how this hate affected them, too. And I knew I needed to incorporate it all in this film, and a 20-minute short film with local interviews would not be sufficient.

I started reaching out to people across the US who could speak with authority on the subject of hate: professors, CEOs, well-known civic leaders, and more. And I learned what is most important to share in this film: Antisemitism may be where the hate begins, but hatred of other marginalized groups invariably follows; staying silent is being complicit. My own experience as a teacher has shown me that students are more and more open and inclusive to each other's differences, and so I am interviewing students who will give viewers hope for a future in which we are seen for who we are, not by the labels used to define us.



This film will weave the stories of survivors with the experiences of a wide spectrum of leaders to inspire and encourage everyone to speak out against hate. These survivors are living testaments that atrocities can happen anywhere if people stay silent. As they enter their 90's and even 100's it is so critical that their experiences make a lasting impact on future generations.



My goal for I Cannot Be a Bystander is to reach the people who know hate is an issue, but don't feel like it is their place to get involved or speak out. I know there is an audience who already knows these things and will still watch the film. But it is the people who keep their heads down and think it's not their problem that I hope to reach- I want them to see the film and add their voices to those who already are taking action, in whatever form, against hate.

I see this film as educational, but the voices of the survivors that tie it together are emotional and compelling. The film will end with a call to action... that none of the viewers can be bystanders, and that everyone is responsible for speaking out. Ultimately, we are our brother's keepers, every one of us.

I hope you will support my vision and help me get this film out to the people who most need to see it.

J. Reinisch

Our Team



Jennie Reinish (*Director/Producer*) began her production career in 1993. She has extensive experience working on feature and documentary films and commercial projects. Jennie spent six years working with legendary Producer Tom Pollock and Director Ivan Reitman at the Montecito Picture Company. Since 2006, Jennie has focused full-time on her production company, Tidepool Pictures. Drawing on her master's in education, received from Northwestern University in 1994, Jennie designed and taught a hands-on filmmaking course to teens, teaching them skills to film and edit projects of their own. Jennie taught for 15 years, while simultaneously working on a variety of feature and documentary films. Jennie served as a juror for Adobe's Design & Achievement Awards for 9 years, providing feedback and mentorship to film students. Between films, Jennie creates videos for local non-profits, small businesses, and individuals through both Tidepool Pictures and her event videography company, Riviera Productions.

Jennie directed and produced the award-winning documentary "Behind the Lines: Fighting a Wildland Fire" and co-produced/directed "The Aphrodite Project." She has also produced two Holocaust-centered documentaries "We Played Marbled" and "Margaret Singer: Seeking

Light." While working on "I Cannot Be a Bystander" she is also currently documenting the 18-month reconstruction of her local synagogue – filming from groundbreaking to ribbon-cutting. Jennie was recently honored with a prestigious 2023 California Arts Council Fellowship, a program designed to recognize excellence in the arts.

Jennie's hobbies include nature photography, hiking and travel.



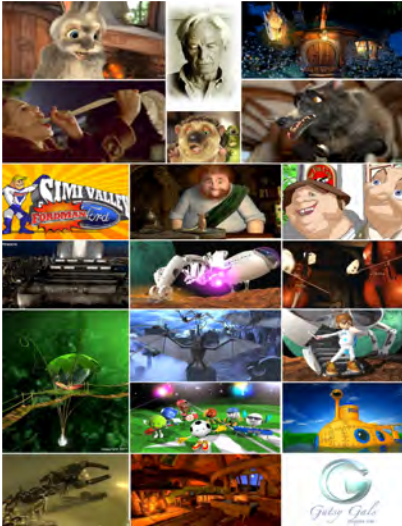
Abbie Nissenon (*Co-Producer*) draws upon a diverse skill set and her deeply personal connection to the material. Throughout her 25-year career, Abbie has channeled her creative talents and dedication to tikkun olam – healing the world – into civic education programming, food and environmental justice movement-building, and production work for film, television, and educational events. She holds a master’s degree in public policy and management from Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz School and a bachelor’s degree with honors from UCLA. One of the most influential people in Abbie’s life– her Grandma Jetti– was a survivor of the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps. Despite having endured unimaginable trauma and loss, Jetti lived the rest of her life fiercely caring for loved ones and strangers alike. Perhaps as a result of

Abbie’s closeness to her grandma, the notion that ‘no one is safe unless we all are safe’ resonates deeply in her bones, and the sense that each of us is obligated to care for one another is a guiding force for her work on this important film.



Lorne Price (*Executive Producer*) has 25 years’ experience in the Film and Television industry in development, production and distribution. Early in his career he worked alongside pioneers John Dunning and Andre Link in a development role. He then worked with producer Ina Fichman at Rock Demers’ Productions La Fete in development and production of fiction and documentary. Most recently, he ran Sphere Films International/WaZabi Films which he co-founded in 2019. This international sales company represented some of the best independent arthouse films from Quebec, Canada and around the world with films that played at prestigious film festivals such Cannes, Berlin, and Toronto. Prior to that Lorne was the Head of Sales and Market Development at the documentary powerhouse

National Film Board of Canada for 14.5 years, responsible for all domestic and international sales and business development. Lorne has proudly served as an international mentor at the SXSW and served on boards and committees of several organizations in the film industry.



Keith English (*Animation Director*) In an animation career spanning 26 years, London-born Keith has worked on a wide range of productions from vfx to directing both film and music, character animation, scriptwriting, including for a multitude of Film Festivals, Cartoon Network, Disney, and Jim Cameron; was commissioned to create an animated work for a John Lassiter tribute event; animated a main character in Sam Raimi's DRAG ME TO HELL; was working with Michael Jackson on a new opening for Thriller to be used in Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT stage show, later to become the movie when Michael passed away, and completed concept design work and pre-visualizations for the producers of Sony's for FALL FROM GRACE (2016), conceptualizing how a 6-winged angel and a 12-winged angel would use levitation to sword-fight in the Chamber of Creation. He runs his own niche animation & design company, SCREAMING PIXELS. His website is www.screamingpixels.com where you can find more than 200 examples of his prolific work. In his 28 years of animation, he has worked on an extraordinary diversity of projects, a very small sample of which can be seen in his new reel: <https://vimeo.com/852164352?share=copy>



Todd Capps (*Composer*) occasionally dabbles as a songwriter, recording artist, member of the indie/alternative rock band Bad Astronaut (Fat Wreck Chords), and composer of critically-acclaimed film & television scores. He and his family live in Santa Barbara, California.

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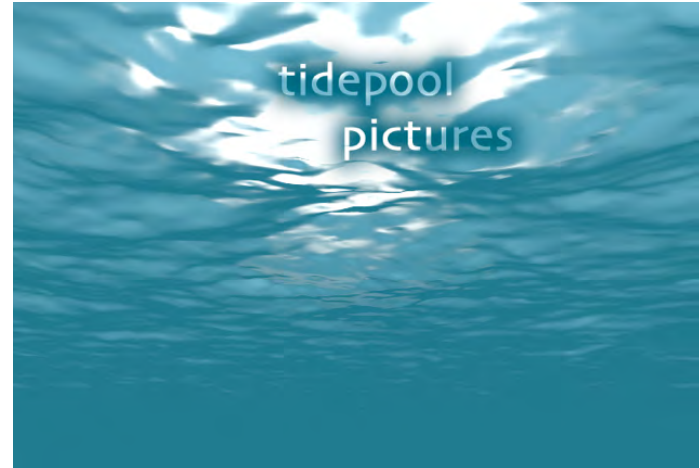
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To view promo videos and for more information about the film, please visit:
www.bystanderfilm.com



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