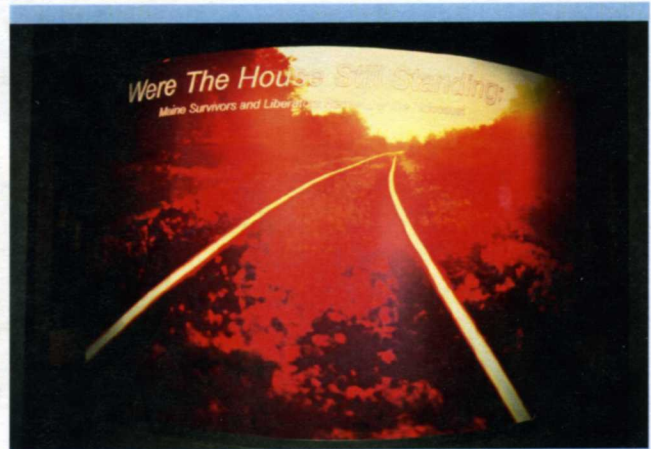


# Were the House Still Standing

Maine Survivors and Liberators Remember the Holocaust *Review by David Scrase*

Despite the four screens in the auditorium, *Were the House Still Standing* is not so much a film as an "installation" that gives visitors to the Holocaust & Human Rights Center of Maine the opportunity to see and hear Maine survivors of the Holocaust and Maine liberators of the camps as they tell of their experiences. Documentary footage, for instance, of *Kristallnacht*, the round-ups, and the killing centers, provides necessary information without attempting to give the history. As each individual begins to speak, a portrait of that person lights up. At the same time pictures of the survivor or liberator appear on the screens. Such pictures are sometimes from the dark days of the events – a small child, a young adult – and sometimes from recent times. We accordingly see people in their gardens, with grandchildren, sitting at home. In addition, there are scenes from the Maine landscape, scenes of the lakes, rivers and streams, of the sea, of islands, of trees and flowers. Sometimes it is winter, sometimes it is spring, summer or fall. One overall effect is of continuity. The generations reflect what a grandfather explained to a child, that one human life is never just one being but always contains the lives of future generations. To kill that one human being is, as the Talmud makes clear, to kill future generations. To save that human life is to save the world. The seasonal changes also reflect the continuity and renewal of life. The water beneath the icy surface of a frozen stream continues to flow and, after the thaw, is revealed as living water in motion.

At the same time as these visual images are shown and have their effect on the viewer, the sounds function in a similar way. The music, the bird-song, the sirens, the trains, are all subordinate to the witness testimony, but, at the same time, complementary to it. We accordingly hear the trains as they transport millions to their death, we hear the voices of Hitler, of



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Goebbels, in addition to those of the survivors. We hear Yiddish, Hebrew prayers, and the sounds of nature. Again, the effect is of continuity as well as devastation.

*Were the House Still Standing* is a *tour de force*, a work of art. It is highly effective in its message, its visual effect and its acoustic accomplishment. The team responsible for its creation – Robert Katz, director; Robert Bernheim, historical consultant; Douglas Quin, sound artist; Matt Dibble, videographer – is to be congratulated on a magnificent achievement.

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