



LILI

a Peter Hegedus film

PRESS KIT



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SOUL VISION FILMS and FOCUSFOX
present in association with SCREEN QUEENSLAND
a PETER HEGEDUS film

Producers
REBECCA McELROY, ANDRÁS MUHI, PETER HEGEDUS, GÁBOR FERENCZY

Writer & Director PETER HEGEDUS

Composer ÁDÁM BALÁZS

Sound Designer GÁBOR CSÁSZÁR

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Line Producer ANIKÓ RAFAY

Producer of Marketing and Distribution BOBBI-LEA DIONYSIUS

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Reenactment Cinematographer GÁBOR SZABÓ, HSC

Editors ÁGNES MÓGOR (HSE) and JUDY YEH

L I L I D O C U M E N T A R Y . C O M

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Produced by FOCUSFOX Produced by SOUL VISION FILMS

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**A mother, Lili, flees her country in the midst
of a revolution, and begins a history
of abandonment that crosses three continents
and four generations.**

One paragraph

Edie was in her late teens when she learnt her mother, Lili Gardonyi, abandoned her two-year-old daughter as she fled Hungary in 1956 after the Soviets quashed the Hungarian revolution. Lili, now 83, has carried this trauma for 60 years and it has had a profound impact on her life and that of her family. This observational documentary follows Edie's efforts across three continents to uncover even more painful secrets in her mother's past as she tries to end the cycle of abandonment in her family. LILI provides a rare and powerful insight into the legacy of war and forced migration on three generations of women.



One page synopsis

Edie Hart grew up in a Hungarian bubble, in Brisbane Australia created by her overly patriotic Hungarian mother Lili Gardonyi. Edie was in her late teens when she found out that her own mother Lili abandoned her two-year-old daughter young Lili, Edie's older sister, when she fled Hungary in 1956 after the Soviets quashed the Hungarian revolution.

With the upcoming 60th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, Edie decides to take her mother back to Hungary, as she investigates her mother's decision to abandon her tiny daughter. She knows it will be her mother's last trip to Hungary.

Arriving in Budapest, Hungary, Lili's memories of a horrific revolution in which over 3000 Hungarians died, soon resurfaces. Lili's task in the uprising as a 20 year old was to collect the burnt dead bodies of teenage freedom fighters.

Soon, Edie and Lili are reunited with Judit, the daughter of Lili's abandoned daughter, Lili's granddaughter. Judit explains how her mother, young Lili was raised by an aunt in Hungary and grew up longing to have a family of her own. At 24, young Lili met Peter and they had two beautiful daughters, however in 1982, it was all taken away in a tragic accident that killed her husband and Judit's younger sister. Unable to recover from the grief, a decade later, young Lili in a heartrending paradox did exactly what her mother did to her in 1956, she left Judit, her surviving daughter in Hungary and moved to Canada, isolating herself from her only remaining family. Lili and her daughter young Lili haven't spoken for years and it seems that nothing will change these dynamics that continue to overshadow the family.

Now, Edie hopes to make things right between her mother and her half sister. She is on her way to Canada with official documents from the 1960s that prove her mother made serious attempts to get her daughter out of Hungary after the revolution. She wants to share these with her half sister Young Lili so that they can all move beyond the pain of abandonment and reunite as a family. The trail of abandonment Edie finds will shock her and the rest of the family as it opens Pandora's box into a distorted family history that has been laid dormant since 1944.

This intimate feature-length documentary, explores the impact of generational abandonment in the Gardonyi family providing a rare and powerful insight into the legacy of war and forced migration on three generations of women.

To put the past to rest, and stop the cycle of abandonment in her family Edie will traverse three continents to investigate the true nature of trauma in her family even if it means confronting her own mother about her past. Will Lili be able to face her demons?



How it happened

by Peter Hegedus, director of LILI

The story of this feature documentary three years in the making is not so dissimilar to the difficulties facing most low budget documentaries. No money but a great team of creatives and a story worth dying for.

In February 2016 a friend and cinematographer Zoltan Vladucz asked me to meet Lili, an overly patriotic 82 year old Hungarian who led the Brisbane Hungarian radio for 30 years. Zoltan said that Lili had an interesting story and we ought to make a short documentary about her life. I was somewhat reluctant to get involved in a new project given my commitments however as a favour to Zoltan, I went to see her. We spent two hours together and she told me her life story: about how as a child she witnessed the massacre of 199 Jewish forced labourers and then in her early 20s she helped freedom fighters in their cause to beat the invading Soviet troops by collecting the dead bodies of their comrades. It was when she told me that she had to leave her child behind in communist Hungary that I thought we need to explore this story further with the view to making a film.

From February 2016 to August 2016, our work revolved around research and development which meant that we needed to understand the intricacies of the story. Meeting Lili's family, especially Edit, the secondary main character for the story became as important as getting to know Lili herself to make sure that she felt comfortable with us. What was enormously helpful in this process is that Zoltan had known Lili since 2013 and spent some time filming her when she did her last broadcast radio for the Hungarian community.

It was in August 2016 when I approached Screen Australia for development funding and given the subject matter, they approved funding to develop the project further. It was during this time that we conducted key interviews with Lili and her daughter Edie which were to serve as foundation blocks for what was already a very complex story.

The second vital stage for this production was to utilise much of our Screen Australia development funding to finance an important part of the story that started to unfold in front of our eyes: Lili returning to Hungary with her daughter Edie to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the revolution and then Edie travelling to Canada from Budapest



to meet her half sister who was abandoned by their mother when she was still a little girl. Due to budget constraints, Zoltan accompanied Lili and Edie to Hungary on his own filming their journey. Soon I followed replacing Zoltan as the 'one man band'. It was then that Edie and I travelled to Canada together and we met her sister young Lili. Both trips were packed with emotions and unexpected revelations about our characters and their past that all paved the way towards a strong narrative structure for our film.

This trip to Hungary also enabled me to meet Andras Muhi and Gabor Ferenczy from Focusfox, the two producers who would prove to be important allies in raising finance for the film. Together we applied for funding through the Hungarian Film Foundation and in January 2017 we were approved a modest grant by the Hungarian TV station. In addition Focusfox committed their own investment to the project in terms of post production. This was a huge push for us as we began the challenging task of trying to raise money for the film in Australia.

The next exciting news for our project came in March 2017 when Brisbane based filmmaker Rebecca McElroy came on board to co-produce the film. Securing finance in Australia proved much more difficult than we originally thought. We were rejected from a major funding agency on the basis that I was a male filmmaker making a film about three women. Having a strong vision for the film with even stronger connections to the women about whom I was making the film, we pressed on.

Luckily by October 2017, we locked in funding from Screen Queensland and leading Australian distributor Ronin Films. Importantly Griffith Film School - where I work as a senior lecturer - has been incredibly supportive of the film and soon they also came to the party with 'in kind' sponsorship as well as approval for me to take paid research leave from teaching to be able to focus on completing the film. It must be said that without this essential support we would not have been able to make the film.

Post production started in August 2017 with editor Judy Yeh who threw herself into the project and worked with me till the end of December in irregular intervals to carve this complex story. During this time we were still shooting key parts of the story and were able to integrate these extra scenes as we went along. In January 2018, Hungarian editor Agnes Mogor came to Australia to continue the edit which brought a wealth of experience to the table enriching our already flourishing story.



Having completed a rough cut late February, Zoltan and I travelled to Budapest where we shot the re-enactment for the film. Working with veteran DOP Gabor Szabo was incredible and the result can be seen in the authenticity emanating from the footage we shot. Then editing continued where we integrated the re-enactment into the film. We faced many narrative challenges in the edit suite as we tried to construct a story that had so much going for it.

Co-producer Rebecca McElroy came to Hungary to help work on the story with us. It was an incredible 2 weeks where we were able to solve much of the story problems we have been grappling with for many weeks.

The film was completed in June 2018 in Focusfox after many months of intense post-production.

Would I do it again? Absolutely...



Director's Statement

Peter Hegedus

What attracts me to stories and what makes me commit to telling them is that I begin to sense and feel contradictions in the people and the overall story. This is what I felt about Lili's story not because I thought that she was not telling the truth. Rather I felt overwhelmed with compassion and empathy for her. I saw how she was struggling with her own inner demons just like everybody else. How cold this sweet old lady abandon her own two year old daughter?

In developing this project, I have researched a number of documentary films that have dealt with issues of familial trauma such as *Stories We Tell* and *Once My Mother*. While these films eloquently explore these issues, I knew that our documentary had the potential to explore family trauma and abandonment from a new perspective, examining how it can become cyclical in a family. What happens to people who are victims, but then become active agents of abandonment? And most importantly: how does the new generation break this cycle? If they can at all?

As much as this film is about the past it is also about its impact on the present and how one courageous woman is able to confront her own demons in order to stop what appears to be a recurring act of abandonment and desertion.

What also attracted me is the contradiction in the personalities of our main characters Lili and Edie. Lili is an introvert who does not like to reflect too much about the past or the present while Edie continues to question her place and is curious about her own past and is full of self reflection. What is also remarkable about them is that both women change throughout the journey and the revelations that come to the surface about them constantly challenge the way I and the audience (for that matter) view them throughout the journey.

The greatest challenge with this film was to be able to connect all the dots and make sense of this very dense and very traumatic 60 years in the lives of the Gardonyi family. When we were editing the film we were very conscious that we needed to peel back the layers slowly without overwhelming and confusing the audience too much. It was like revealing a deeply painful trauma: you'd want to do it slowly and sensitively so that it is given ample time for processing.

Key interviews were vital to set the scene and provide insight and at times good old fashioned 'exposition' about the complex family relationships that are woven across this story. The heart of the story was definitely the moving observational footage as we captured the story unfolding in front of our eyes. However another key element



of what brought life to the film was the reenactment that illustrated the original trauma to emerge in the film. The primary shocking moment takes place at the train station where in 1944, 8 year-old Lili witnessed the massacre of 199 Jewish forced labourers. This is the very first harrowing event in Lili's life resulting in her own abandonment at only thirteen.

While the film deals with some very heavy and difficult issues it will also have some lighter moments. Both Edith and Lili make jokes at their own expense and enjoy a good laugh. They don't always take themselves too seriously, simply because they can't. They understand the irony of certain situations, while Edith's optimism and humour in particular will bring balance to the overall story.

I would like to acknowledge the support and dedication of a great group of creatives who worked so hard to make sure that my vision for the film is realized. Their faith in me has given me great deal of strength as a director and their insights and acute observations about the characters and their journey enrich this unique story.





Producers' Statement

Peter Hegedus and Rebecca McElroy

Producing LILI was a step by step process. In the initial stages we were only going to make a short 15 minute film for a Museum in Budapest. However, as the story began to unfold we started to recognise that this project goes beyond the realms of an exhibition like showing.

At the beginning, Peter acted as principal producer but as the project grew he invited Hungarian producers Andras Muhi and Gabor Ferenczy (FocusFox) on board. In Australia he began to collaborate with Rebecca McElroy who came to the project as the other Australian producer.

Producing LILI has been a collaborative process and one that we've all benefited from. All the producers brought their own talent to the project that we believe made this film stronger and more viable for future exposure.

Funding has been difficult to obtain and we suffered a number of setbacks from when government agencies and TV stations both in Australia and overseas passed on financing the project. However, being given the opportunity from the Hungarian MTVA broadcaster and then being able to access the producer equity program (PEP) here in Australia, has been key to our success in receiving funding.

Griffith Film School where Peter Hegedus works as senior lecturer, has also played a critical role in securing funding and making it possible for Peter to work full time on this project.

The creative challenge we set ourselves, was to produce a film that was a bi cultural narrative, exploring the experience of a family whose circumstances have spread them around the globe. Working with four producers from both Hungary and Australia, proved key to creating a truly multi-cultural and story that resonates universally.



Biography

Peter Hegedus

Peter's filmmaking career spans close to 20 years. He has been making films since the age of 17. His critically acclaimed films have won numerous awards around the world and been broadcast in many countries. Peter's work is characterized by a commitment to social justice be they documentary or drama.

In 1998 at the age of 21, he embarked on **Grandfathers and Revolutions**, a one hour documentary about his grandfather, the Prime Minister of Hungary who called in the Soviet troops to quash the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. The film established Peter as an international documentary filmmaker.

After starting his production company Soul Vision Films Pty Ltd, Peter made **Inheritance, a fisherman's story** based around an ecological disaster that occurred in Hungary in 2000. The film follows the life of a fisherman Balazs Meszaros who struggles to survive after the disaster. The film was short listed for the 2004 Academy Awards and won an additional seven awards around the world including Grand Prizes at the Global Peace Festival.

In 2011 working on two unique stories for two different broadcasters, Peter completed two feature documentaries: **My America** which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival and was broadcast around the world. **The Trouble With St Mary's** – broadcast on the ABC was about a rebel priest who sacked by the Catholic Church for unorthodox practices.

Since 2013 Peter has been working at Griffith Film School and is now the senior lecture and **Program Director of the Master of Screen Production program.**

Recently Peter has produced and directed **Éva** a short documentary about Éva Fahidi a Holocaust survivor's passionate perspective on the refugee crisis in Europe. Peter also co-directed **Strudel Sisters** a short documentary selected for Hot Docs International Film Festival as well as the Sydney Film Festival. Notably, both of his latest documentaries Éva and Strudel Sisters were nominated at the St Kilda Film Festival for best documentary. Strudel Sisters recently won The 2016 Devour! Golden Tine Award for Best Short Documentary.

In 2018, Peter completed the feature documentary **Lili** a co-production between Hungary and Australia about a young woman who abandoned her two year old daughter in 1956 setting off a cycle of abandonment in her family over three generations. This feature documentary is set to be released later on in the year.



Filmography

Peter Hegedus

- 2018** **"Lili"** – a 52 / 85 minute doc about a family torn apart by generational abandonment - yet to be released
Producer, Writer/Director
- 2016** **"Strudel Sisters"** – 8 minute short doc about two sisters who make strudel from a recipe they learnt from their mother. Official selection – **HOT DOCS, Sydney Film festival, St Kilda Film Festival 2016 Devour! Golden Tine Award for Best Short Doc!**
Co-producer/ Writer/director
- 2015** **"Eva"** – an 8 min short doc about Eva Fahidi who shares her views on the 2015 refugee crisis.
Nominated for Best documentary at St Kilda Film Festival
Producer/ director
- 2014** **"BIG STORIES SMALL TOWNS"** – a series of short docs (approx 45 min) about the town of Beaudesert in Queensland Australia . **Commissioned by Award winning Big Stories Co**
Co-producer/ Writer/director
- 2013** **"Welcome to the Lucky Country"** – 20 minute short drama film about the plight of refugees arriving to Australia illegally.
AWARD – Audience award at the Backyard Film Festival
Producer/ Writer/director
- 2011** **"Trouble with St Mary's"** – 72/56 minute documentary for ABC TV Australia, Screen Australia and Screen Queensland
Producer/ Writer/director
- 2011** **"My America"** – 84/52 minute theatrical doc broadcast by SBS, ARTE, YLE, ORF; Sydney Film Festival, Mumbai Film Festival
Producer/ Writer/director
- 2007** **"Wings to Fly"** – a 57 minute documentary for ABC
Premiered on the ABC Compass program
Producer/ Writer/director



2003

“Inheritance, a fisherman's story” (75/52 min)

A feature length documentary for SBS TV Australia, RTBF

- **Short-listed for an Academy Award 2004**
- **Grand Prize** at the Global Peace Film festival
- **Grand Prize** at Real Life on Film Festival
- **Special Jury Prize** – Int’l Science Festival
- **Film Critic’s prize** for best young documentarian
- **Best social documentary** - the Hungarian Film Festival
- **Official selection** at Margaret Mead Film Festival, Visions Du Reel Documentary Festival, Hot Springs Doc Festival, Palms Springs Film festival, Full Frame Doc Film Festival

Producer, Writer, and Director

2000

“Grandfathers and Revolutions” A 52 minute documentary

- **Grand Prix** Festival International, du film independent Brussels,
- **Crystal Heart Award** Heartland Film Festival USA
- Honorary diploma and best documentary by student jury at the 37th International Krakow documentary Festival
- **Grand Prize** for best Television documentary at the 14th Parnu International Documentary Festival

Producer, Writer and Director



Testimonials

"This multi-faceted narrative about four generations of women across three continents packs an incredibly powerful emotional punch as we witness their confrontation with a repressed family history that intersects with the national."

- Dr Anne Demy-Geroe, Griffith Film School

"It is powerful, emotionally charged and brilliantly layered storytelling. The unfolding of characters and stories through the structure of live, dramatic and archival sequences combine to create an extraordinary piece of work."

- Therese Nolan Brown, Visual Arts Librarian, Griffith University

"This multi-faceted narrative about four generations of women across three continents packs an incredibly powerful emotional punch as we witness their confrontation with a repressed family history that intersects with the national."

Days after I viewed Lili it continued to resonate with me. It wouldn't go away. I had friends in Hobart whose mother hijacked an ambulance to escape from Budapest during the uprising of the 50s. She was the first brave woman I ever met. And then Lili. I saw the same thing in her eyes, constant reflection, ever watchful of her two sons and a daughter, grateful to have survived the horrors and trauma of two dreadful eras. I forget her first name, but I will remember Lili thanks to a film about her life.



There are many stories like Lili's flowing from the Holocaust, and the events in Hungary a decade or so later. No one story is the same, no one film alike. So it is with Peter Hegedus's film: it is different; it stays with you. History is like that - punctuated with constant reminders.

We are fortunate to have this powerful story about a Hungarian mother and family on film for now and future generations. It's one of those stories that must be told, and a film that must be seen."

- Des Power AM, award winning filmmaker and Board Member of the Asia Pacific Film Awards

"A continually surprising and affecting documentary, beautifully shot and edited. A powerful statement of how trauma can reverberate through generations. May be Peter's best film so far."

- Mark Jonathan Harris, Academy Award winner and Distinguished Professor
School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California