

Short synopsis

A Jewish teenager and an injured soldier join a doomed plot to kill Hitler. They face almost certain death, yet luck and love shine upon them as they outwit Nazi terror and become the first couple married in post-war Berlin.



Medium synopsis

As a teenager in Nazi Germany, Jutta is shocked to discover she is Jewish. She joins the German resistance and meets Helmuth, an injured soldier. The two become sweethearts and co-conspirators in the Valkyrie plot to assassinate Hitler.

Surviving Hitler: A Love Story is a harrowing tale of war, resistance and survival. At the center of the documentary is a love story for the ages, original 8mm footage (shot by Helmuth) and, miraculously, a happy ending. ©Jay Rosenblatt

Technical factsheet

producer/director	John-Keith Wasson
editor	Carla Gutierrez
cinematography	Helmuth Cords, Fortunato Procopio, John-Keith Wasson, Charlie Wuppermann
original score	Walter Koerte
sound mix	Dan Lumiere
executive producer	John H Wasson
special thanks	Robert Markowitz
partial funding provided by	Lynn and Jules Kroll fund for Jewish Documentary Film

Original TRT: 65:40
One Hour TRT: 55:58

Biography of the Director

John-Keith Wasson graduated from Dartmouth College and the London Film School. He has worked predominantly as a cinematographer. His shooting credits include the award-winning documentary "The Devil Came on Horseback."

In 2007, John-Keith met Jutta. She shared with him the details from her life and eventually trusted him with her home movies and love letters.

This is John-Keith's directorial debut.

Additional pictures:



Awards:



FOUNDATION
FOR JEWISH
CULTURE

Lynn and Jules Kroll Fund
for Jewish Documentary Film

Press clippings

The Herald-Sun



'Surviving Hitler: A Love Story' is a lesson in German resistance

BY DAWN BAUMGARTNER VAUGHAN

The love story of Jutta and Helmuth is truly one for the ages. A young woman meets a young man at a dance in 1934. She finds out she is Jewish as the Nazis controlling Germany begin their diabolical plan. When

the couple meet again years later, he is a soldier in the German Army who becomes involved in the Valkyrie plot to assassinate Hitler.

What are their chances of surviving World War II? Such is the story of the documentary "Surviving Hitler: A Love Story."

Pull Frame Documentary Film Festival will host the world premiere of the film by director and producer John-Keith Wasson today.

Jutta serves as the narrator over archival film footage and photographs from the time. Helmuth's letters from war in Russia are read. She discusses her family's involvement in the German resistance and their harboring of a fugitive. Eventually they are all arrested by the Nazi Gestapo, Jutta after she goes to the headquarters herself inquiring about her parents.

"Surviving Hitler: A Love Story" is more than just a love story, as it includes first-person storytelling of the German resistance, a point not often heard. That's one reason Jutta thought it was important to share that story, she says in the film. And it's a major reason that "Surviving Hitler" is a film that must be seen. Jutta was on the run in hiding from the Gestapo after her mother, who was Jewish, was sent to a concentration camp and her father imprisoned for his role in the resistance.

That Helmuth manages to avoid the sure death of those tried for the assassination attempt on the führer, and the post-war reunion of Jutta, Helmuth and her parents is nothing short of a miracle.

As Jutta herself says, "It is extraordinary, isn't it?"

An entire world of experiences



Helmut and Jutta Cords, subjects of the documentary... (San Francisco Jewish Film Festvr)

"Surviving Hitler: A Love Story"

Director: John-Keith Wasson

United States, 2010, 65 min., color and black & white, English, German (English subtitles)

West Coast Premiere

The Castro screening will feature full English subtitles for the hearing impaired

Screenings: Castro Theatre, 1:15 p.m. Wednesday;
Roda Theatre at Berkeley Rep, 2:15 p.m. Aug. 4.

"Surviving Hitler" is a gripping tale that seems tailored more for the pages of a Ken Follett thriller than a documentary film: two teens meet at a dance and fall in love in 1934, and later conspire to assassinate Adolf Hitler. While the film itself is not so cut and dried, the story could easily be turned into a Hollywood film.

The documentary begins with Jutta, a shy 15-year-old German girl, meeting Helmut Cords, a boy she thinks too handsome to actually be interested in her. When he brushes off another girl who tries to cut in while dancing with Jutta, and courts her for

the remainder of the evening, a love affair blossoms. But the burgeoning Nazi Party conspires against them. As Hitler gears up to invade Poland, Jutta discovers her mother is Jewish, and that she will never be able to marry or go to university. She promptly joins the resistance. Her parents harbor a fugitive at their home. Helmut is sent to the Russian front, where he serves in an artillery unit of the Nazi army and writes letters to Jutta. When Jutta and

Helmuth next meet, during the bitter winter of 1941, he is disillusioned. He eventually takes part in Operation Valkyrie, the failed 1944 plot to kill Hitler. Helmut, Jutta and Jutta's parents all end up imprisoned, and all miraculously survive and are later reunited. After Germany falls to the Allies in May 1945, Helmut and Jutta are the first couple to be wed in Berlin in post-Third Reich Germany.

It's perhaps better that producer/director John-Keith Watson, who previously worked as cinematographer on the 2007 Darfur genocide documentary, "The Devil Came On Horseback," chose to make this tale of love in the time of war as authentic as possible. He does this through tightly cropped interviews with Jutta — who in her late 80s still maintains a powerful presence — and never-before-seen 8mm home movies filmed by Helmut. While Jutta didn't actually take part in the assassination plot, and we only have Helmut's letters as evidence that he took part, "Surviving Hitler" remains a testament to the will to survive and the power of love.

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By
Special to the Daily News



GO ON POP CULTURE

The Verge

Pop Culture

Love & War (Plus Nazis)

On July 26, 2010 at 12:00 PM



On July 20, 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg brought a briefcase bomb into a military conference and attempted to blow up Adolf Hitler. The plot failed, Hitler survived, and hundreds of conspirators were executed in retaliation. Tom Cruise immortalized von Stauffenberg with his amazing feat of eyepatch acting in *Valkyrie*, but the larger world of the German resistance, as well as the minor but essential players who contributed to the operation, has largely been overlooked. John Keith Wasson's documentary *Surviving Hitler: A Love Story* unearths a small but valuable piece of this lost world.

The film had its New York premiere last month at the Museum of Jewish Heritage as part of the Museum's Film Club series. While the filmmakers seek wider distribution, *Surviving Hitler* will continue to screen at film festivals across the country, including the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival on July 28th and August 4th.

The story opens with 8mm footage of a young soldier, and moves to a teenage girl twirling the full skirt of a new dress. The images have the eerily enchanting pull of all home movies, but with the added effect that this is Berlin, 1934. As Jutta, the skirt-twirling teenager who now narrates the story, explains, she met Helmuth at a dancing school shortly after he'd bought himself a movie camera. A few years later, Jutta will learn that she is half-Jewish, and Helmuth will be fighting for Hitler on the Russian front. The two sweethearts stay in touch through Helmuth's military service and Jutta's life under the Nuremberg laws. As the war wears on, Jutta and her parents try to keep their heads down in Berlin while joining a clandestine circle of resistance. Helmuth returns from the isolation of the Eastern Front to learn for the first time the full horror of the Nazi agenda. He joins the resistance and takes a job in von Stauffenberg's office. In the aftermath of the failed assassination, Helmuth, Jutta, and Jutta's parents all manage to endure by a combination of luck, courage, and ingenuity.

John Keith Wasson, who served as the cinematographer on the 2007 Darfur documentary, *The Devil Came on Horseback*, weaves the tale by alternating Jutta's plucky on-camera interviews with Helmuth's 8mm movies and other historical footage. Those home movies, which miraculously survived the war in Helmuth's mother's apartment, are reason enough to watch *Surviving Hitler*, providing a rare and intimate glimpse of relatively ordinary life carrying on in Berlin despite the encroaching horror. And even if you've seen it before, the images of the Battle of Berlin and Stalingrad remain astonishing.

As Quentin Tarantino demonstrated in *Inglourious Basterds*, the fantasy of blowing Hitler to pieces remains a powerful and sublimely gratifying one. The subjects in *Surviving Hitler* may have failed in that attempt, but merely outliving the Führer in spite of everything has proven to be a sweet form of revenge in itself.

— Miriam Coleman

Highlights of S.F. Jewish Film Festival



Helmut and Jutta Cordt in "Surviving Hitler: A Love Story."

Surviving Hitler: A Love Story

U.S., 65 minutes

1:15 p.m. July 28, Castro; 2:15 p.m. Aug. 4, Roda.

The 1945 wedding of Jutta and Helmut Cordt was the first to take place in bombed out Berlin after the German surrender. Shortly before the ceremony, both had been languishing in a Gestapo prison - and her parents had been arrested, as well. All four survived, a miracle considering that Jutta was half Jewish, and Helmut, a German officer, had held a position in the office of Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, a principal in the Operation Valkyrie conspiracy against Hitler. The plot failed, and anyone connected with von Stauffenberg was in extreme danger. Jutta and her family had been involved in the resistance. She narrates the story in this affecting documentary, with many dramatic highlights. Wanted by the Gestapo, Jutta boldly walked into the group's headquarters in search of information about her parents; and after the Russians took Berlin, she evaded rape, which was endemic, by feigning illness. Though Helmut died in 1972, he is present in oral history recordings and quotations from his letters. We also see a lot of 8mm footage he shot. Overall, it's a remarkable look at life during the war from the perspective of Germans who opposed to Hitler.

San Francisco Chronicle

July 28, 2000 | By Walter Addiego

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Other press mentions:

"DocFilm's Best of Full Frame Film Festival" April 12, 2010, Documentary Films Online



"The 30th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival – the Castro Week Highlights" July 30, 2010 Life with Moveis and Maxxx blog



"The structure of the story," he said of "Surviving Hitler," "is more wonderful than any film Hollywood could have written." The Herald-Sun "Full Frame ceremony awards filmmakers" April 12, 2010

Surviving Hitler
A Love Story
www.survivinghitleralovestory.com

RADIO: Featured in "the Story with Dick Gordon" on American Public Media (25 minute interview)
http://thestory.org/archive/the_story_1037_Lap_Baker.mp3/view