

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 12 January 2021

Israeli author, filmmaker Michael Kagan, wins Silver in 2020 Spotlight Documentary Film



Awards

Author, poet and filmmaker Michael Kagan wins the Spotlight Silver Award for unforgettable independent documentary film The Book of Curses

On January 5, 2021, prolific Israeli author, poet and filmmaker Michael Kagan was announced a winner of the Spotlight Silver Award for the production of the 2015 independent documentary film *The Book of Curses: The Diary of Benjamin Berkovich* (Iouri Goroulev, director; Tamara Vershitskaya, co-producer). The 2020 Spotlight Documentary Film Awards classified *The Book of Curses* as an “unforgettable film” and one of the top independent films of 2020.

Earning scores that placed *The Book of Curses* in the third-highest category of the Spotlight Documentary Film Awards, Kagan’s compelling film sends him to Poland and Belarus in pursuit of a lost diary from 1942 and “the voices behind the pages.” As he explores the old diary’s “sweeping views of the descent to hell” encountered by Benjamin Berkovich and those around him in the Holocaust, Kagan is confronted and challenged with Berkovich’s final message calling for revenge without mercy and a curse on humankind.

“Do not compile lamentations about our destruction, only a book of curses—one huge and firm curse to all humanity and culture. Signed, Berkovich Binyamin.” —Michael Kagan

Tracing Berkovich’s story involved tracing parts of Kagan’s own family history, as his relatives came from the same town Navarodok (Novogrudok) and were incarcerated in the

same ghetto as the diarist. His father, Jack Kagan, managed to escape and join the Bielski partisans, made famous by the Hollywood action movie – *Defiance* (2008 dir. Edward Zwick). In a reconstructed Nazi concentration camp barracks that housed the last 250 Jews in the entire area, Kagan asks of Berkovich — and perhaps, of his own lost relatives — “Look at me, lying here like you lay so many years ago. Did I find you?”

“I searched for the author for two years. But found nothing — not a trace — of where he came from or what was his end,” Kagan states. “In 2012, I wrote a play about my search that incorporated parts of the diary. In July 2015, we filmed the premier performance of this play, acted by non-Jewish locals, on the site of the ghetto.”

The Book of Curses documentary is informed by interviews with a Nazi hunter, a spiritual psychologist, the grandson of a survivor, and a Holocaust survivor herself, who speaks about the life-threatening risks she took as a young woman under the Nazi regime.

Based in Jerusalem, Israel, Michael Kagan is the author of *God's Prayer: A Sacred Challenge to Humanity* (2014, Albion-Andalus Books), *The King's Messenger: A Parable about Judaism* (2013, Albion-Andalus Books), and *The Holistic Haggadah: How Will You Be Different This Passover Night?* (2005, Urim). Kagan is a prolific creator of poetry, screenplays, theatre plays and short stories, as well as co-producer of the 2015 documentary *Tunnel of Hope*, which memorializes the escape from the same Nazi work camp by 250 Jews in 1943, through a 200-meter tunnel, dug in the most desperate of situations with the most primitive of tools.

Links

- *The Book of Curses* film trailer can be found on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/437547781>
- Spotlight Awards: <https://filmfreeway.com/spotlightdocawards>
- Michael Kagan, articles: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/author/michael-kagan/>

For more information, please write to: bookofcurses2021@gmail.com