

PRESS NOTES



Movie Poster

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A TRUE STORY OF LOVE AND SURVIVAL

THREE BROTHERS IN SHANGHAI

LOGLINE

After fleeing Nazi Austria for Shanghai—one of the few havens for undocumented Jewish refugees—three brothers survive a perilous childhood, only to face a heartbreaking choice at the end of the war.

SYNOPSIS:

When the Gewing family fled Austria in 1938 to escape the Nazis, they found refuge in Shanghai—one of the only havens open to undocumented Jewish refugees. Now in their 90s, brothers Walter, Heinz, and Ehud reflect on a childhood shaped by danger and resilience, recalling moments of joy, loss, and a heartbreaking decision at the end of the war. For the brothers, Shanghai was more than a place to survive—it was where sibling bonds were tested, strengthened, and shaped into an unbreakable connection that lasted a lifetime.



Ehud

Heinz

Walter



Heinz

Walter

Ehud

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As a child, I was mesmerized when my grandfather Heinz and great Uncles Walter and Ehud talked about growing up as Jewish refugees in Shanghai. As an adult, I realized there were gaps in their story, and I wanted to know more. So, over a decade and a half ago, I picked up a camera and started filming whenever the brothers were together. These conversations form the core of the film.

The emotions that spilled out during the interviews took me by surprise. For most of their lives, the brothers chose not to talk about the tragedy and loss they experienced as children. But, when I spoke with them on camera, they shared long-suppressed memories. We laughed and we cried, and I hope that viewers will feel that same range of emotions when they watch the film.

Three Brothers in Shanghai is an intimate look at one family, but there is a universality to the brothers' experiences that speak to the challenges faced by all refugees when borders close and options narrow. At this moment in time, it feels especially important to share their story.

— Nick Andrus



Walter and Nick



Heinz and Nick



Ehud and Nick

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



Director - Nick Andrus

Born and raised in San Francisco, Nick earned his BA in History and Critical Studies from the University of Southern California, School of Cinematic Arts. Nick is a DGA Unit Production Manager who has worked on feature films, commercials, and music videos. His credits include documentaries *From Here to There* and *Memes & Nightmares*, which was produced by LeBron James and premiered at Tribeca. He has also worked on dozens of narrative feature films, including Sundance projects *The Greasy Strangler*, *R#J*, and *Land*. His resume includes commercials for national brands and music videos for high profile artists. A lover of documentary film and a lifelong student of the craft of film-making, Nick was inspired by his beloved grandfather and great uncles' experiences to expand his own creative practice to make *Three Brothers in Shanghai*.



Writer/Producer - Jenny Gewing Andrus

A librarian and writer, Jenny's passions include research, oral history and storytelling. She graduated from UC Santa Cruz (BA) and Yale University (MPH). Her picture book *Elsa's Chessboard*, based on the life of her grandmother, a chess-playing refugee, was published by award-winning Neal Porter Books in 2025. It was named one of Tablet's Best Jewish Children's Books of the Year, and was on the California Independent Booksellers Alliance (CIBA) shortlist for a Golden Poppy Award. Jenny believes in the power of a strong narrative to move audiences, whether in film or literature, and she is grateful for the talented team behind *Three Brothers in Shanghai*.



Editor - Michael Gil

A film editor and producer based in Los Angeles, Michael has worked on documentary, narrative and experimental films, and frequently returns to themes of memory and identity. It is his ambition to create engaging media that can catalyze positive change and inspire empathy. His work has aired on PBS, screened at festivals globally, and served as educational resources in classrooms and for nonprofits throughout the United States. He is a descendant of Austrian Holocaust survivors on his father's side, and a large family of Southeast Asian Jews on his mother's side. He earned his B.A. from Harvard University, where he studied Philosophy and Cognitive Neuroscience. He earned his M.F.A. in Film Production at the University of Southern California, School of Cinematic Arts.



Composer - David Michael Celia

David Michael Celia is a composer, record producer, and multi-instrumentalist who has scored over 80 hours of television. He has produced, mixed, and recorded records that have been featured on KCRW, BBC6, and has had placements on Netflix, HBO, Cartoon Network, and more. David uses an organic approach of live instruments that has shaped much of his sound while staying current by incorporating many of today's modern technologies and tools. David also releases instrumental global groove music with his band, The Bombillas, and runs the boutique vinyl record label, F-Spot Records, based in Los Angeles, CA.

ABOUT THE BROTHERS

Twin brothers Heinz and Ernst (Ehud) Gewing were born in Austria in 1932. Heinz liked to joke, “I arrived 20 minutes before Ernst, because I pushed him out of the way!” Inseparable as children, the twins took different paths as adults, yet always remained close.



Heinz Gewing



Ehud Gewing



Walter, the eldest Gewing brother, was born in Austria in 1930. One of only two Jewish children at his school, he ran home every day to avoid being beaten up. Later, in Shanghai, he slept in the family store to guard against intruders. Walter was the keeper of family history, retaining memories of their life in Austria and their years in Shanghai.



Walter Gewing

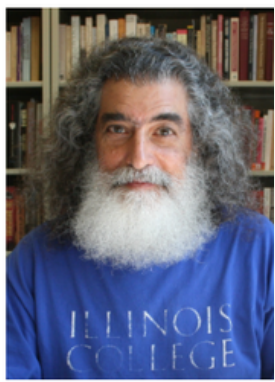


ABOUT THE EXPERTS



Dvir Bar-Gal, Shanghai Jewish Tours

Journalist and photographer Dvir Bal-Gal has led Shanghai Jewish history tours for more than two decades. Drawing on his deep knowledge of the city, he transports visitors to a bygone Shanghai—a place where impoverished European Jewish refugees lived alongside Chinese residents, colonial elites, and Japanese soldiers.



Steve Hochstadt, Professor Emeritus of History, Illinois College

Steve Hochstadt, influenced by his grandparents—Viennese Jews who fled the Holocaust and immigrated to Shanghai—has done extensive research and writing on the history of the Jews in Shanghai. His work includes the groundbreaking book *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich* (2012), published by Palgrave Macmillan. He is an active member of the Sino-Judaic Institute.



Marsha L. Rozenblit, Professor of Modern Jewish History, University of Maryland

Marsha Rozenblit is a distinguished historian and author specializing in the social and cultural history of Central European Jewry. She is currently working on a book about the destinations and experiences of Jews who fled Nazi-controlled Europe between 1938 and 1941, focusing on how they adapted to life in new countries.



Ryan Cheuk Him Sun, PhD, Dept of History, University of British Columbia

Ryan Cheuk Him Sun's research focuses on the entangled histories of the British Empire and the Holocaust. He has a particular interest in what it was like for the Jewish refugees on the ships that took them from Europe to Asia—how passing through port cities and meeting local communities shaped their views of “the Orient,” and the ways in which these journeys challenge traditional Holocaust narratives.



Ship Route Europe to Shanghai

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THREE BROTHERS IN SHANGHAI

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR NICK ANDRUS

Q: What sparked the idea for the film?

When I first started filming my grandfather Heinz and his brothers Ehud and Walter, it wasn't with a documentary in mind—I was a recent college grad with a DV camera who wanted to preserve their stories. The brothers didn't get together often, because Ehud lived in Israel, but when they did, I'd record their conversations about growing up in Shanghai. It wasn't until many years later, when my grandfather began his battle with dementia, that I began shaping the interviews into a documentary. I thought that people would be interested in the intriguing story of the Shanghai Jews, a lesser-known but important chapter of WWII history.

Q: What background did you bring to the project?

Since graduating from the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California over fifteen years ago, I've worked as a unit production manager and line producer on narrative films, documentaries, music videos, and commercials. My focus has been on helping directors bring their creative vision to life, experiences that left me with an understanding and appreciation of the filmmaking process. I particularly love seeing historical stories translated onto screen. Stepping into the director's role for the documentary felt like both a challenge and a natural evolution. It pushed me outside my comfort zone, but in a way that felt necessary—as the next step in my own creative life.

Q: What pressures did you feel making the film?

I felt like it was a race against time. I had been interviewing the brothers since they were in their late 70s, but by the time I started formally working on the documentary, they were in their early 90s. The clock was ticking, and I realized the importance of getting first-hand, professional quality accounts of their experiences before it was too late.

Q: There are other films about the Shanghai Jewish experience, what makes your film different?

I've watched and enjoyed many of the other Shanghai Jewish films, including *Shanghai Ghetto* (2002), *Above the Drowning Sea* (2017), and *Harbor from the Holocaust* (2020). *Three Brothers in Shanghai* stands out by offering a more intimate perspective. By focusing on one family, and specifically the memories of siblings, it gives you a sense of what it was like to grow up as a refugee child in Shanghai. Hearing the brothers' recollections makes the history personal. It's not just about survival, but about relationships, the long-term impact of parental decisions, and the bond between siblings. Those elements make the story relatable to viewers.



Heinz and Nick
Photo Booth

Q: How did you research the documentary?

I immersed myself in history, reading more than 30 nonfiction books on Jewish Shanghai refugees, many of them first-hand accounts. Last spring, I traveled to Shanghai with my wife and father-in-law, where we retraced the Gewing family's journey. Walking the city's streets helped me imagine my grandfather there with his brothers. We even managed to find the site of the family's store in the French Concession district. Much of old Shanghai—particularly the Hongkew Ghetto where they lived—is gone, but fortunately the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum offers a vivid window into that world. Meeting with the museum's director and staff was a remarkable experience that deepened my appreciation for the Chinese people whose open borders saved the lives of my family and so many others.

Q: How were family members involved in making the film?

I worked on the documentary with my mother, writer and co-producer Jenny Gewing Andrus. Turns out we are great collaborators! Together, we visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where we looked through archival materials from the 1930s and 1940s. My mother's background as a librarian definitely helped. We also approached interviews with the film's experts as a team: I was in front of the camera; mom worked behind the scenes.

My wife Ashley assisted me throughout the process, including when I interviewed my great-uncle Walter in the Bay Area shortly before he passed away. Walter showed us the incredible collection of documents he had saved from his time in Shanghai. Some of these materials ended up in the film, including the family's Austrian passports stamped with a large J for Jew.

Q: Was there something surprising you learned out about your relatives?

The three brothers were each committed in their own way to the Jewish concept of tzedakah (giving back). My grandfather was a big supporter of refugee rights. After he passed away, I found out that for most of his adult life he made annual donations to HIAS, a Jewish organization that helps refugees and displaced people of all faiths and backgrounds. This same organization had helped his family when they arrived in the U.S. from Shanghai in 1948. I know my grandfather would have been pleased by the mention of HIAS in the end credits.

Q: Were there any funny anecdotes that didn't make it into the film?

Walter enjoyed telling the story about his grandfather's false teeth: One afternoon, grandfather left his false teeth sitting on the window sill of the apartment where they all lived in Shanghai. Grandmother was cleaning and accidentally knocked them onto the street below. She ran down three flights of stairs as fast as she could, but the teeth were already gone. Someone had stolen them! I know it wasn't funny at the time, but the Gewing brothers had a way of finding humor in every situation.

Q: What are your personal wishes for the film?

I hope my family is proud of the film. Sadly, my grandfather Heinz and great uncle Walter passed away before the film was completed, but both expressed excitement about the project in its early stages. The only surviving member of the trio, my great-uncle Ehud, has seen the film and told me he was very moved by it, which meant a lot. I am now a father myself, and I look forward to watching the film with my son when he is older, so he can see who his great grandfather was and where he came from.

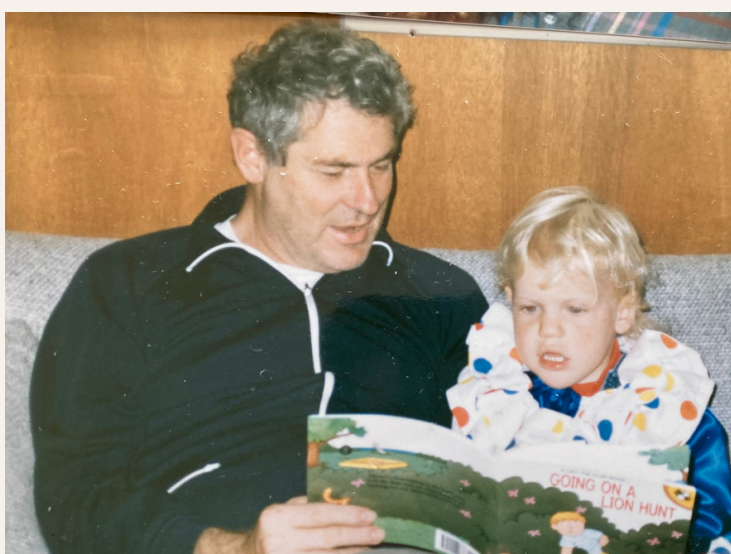
Q: What do you hope audiences will take away from the film?

In the film, Walter remembers trying to outrun bullies after school in Austria, and being told by a policeman not to enter his father's shop because it was owned by a Jew. Anti-semitism, which forced the Gewing family to flee Europe, is again on the rise.

The brothers' experiences are rooted in a specific time and place, but parts of their story feel universal. There are more displaced individuals worldwide now than at any other point in history—people who are desperately seeking safety as borders close and hostility towards refugees grows. Families still face the most difficult, heartbreaking choices.

I hope audiences leave the film not only with a deeper understanding of Jewish history, but also feel moved to stand up and make a difference in the lives of refugees.

Despite a difficult start to life, the Gewing brothers went on to lead long, fulfilling lives, sustained by their connection to one another and to their own families and communities. I hope viewers feel uplifted by that outcome. Most of all, I hope they enjoy meeting the Gewing brothers.



Heinz and baby Nick



Heinz and Nick with camera



Nick and baby Arthur



Jenny and Nick