

Doc shocks about FDR's indifference to Jews' plight

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By Ruth L Ratny

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Perhaps one of the most important documentaries about the Holocaust, about an unknown Washington diplomat who fought to awaken America to Hitler's plan to annihilate the Jews and saved the lives of thousands of lives has been produced by Shuli Eshel's [EshelProductions](#).

Three years in the works, "[A Voice Among the Silent: The Life of James G. McDonald](#)," was part of a nationwide Christian Response program held on Capitol Hill April 28, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, moderated by Congresswoman Donna Christensen (D-VI).



Eshel's feature-length doc is based on recently discovered diaries and papers of McDonald (1896-1964) that present new insights into the attitudes towards "the Jewish question" in the 1930s.

The first she heard about McDonald was at a lecture at Temple Shalom: how his daughter found his diaries while cleaning out the basement of his home. "McDonald met with Roosevelt, the Pope and after meeting Hitler in 1933 and hearing of his devastating plan he knew that it was his calling to save Jewish lives," she says.

FDR's indifference told for the first time

"For the first time, I am telling that President Roosevelt had knowledge of how European Jews were denied entry to America," Eshel says. FDR had appointed his friend, Breckenridge Long, to head the visa division of the State Department, where Long continuously and methodically reduced the Jewish entry quota.

"What is so shocking is that Roosevelt knew about the reduced quotas and did nothing about it. Consequently, untold thousands of people who had been refused entry here were turned back and murdered."



Israeli-born filmmaker Eshel, known for her many docs about sensitive Jewish and Middle East issues, started the McDonald project in November, 2010 for a paltry budget of \$56,000, money she had raised through private sources.

Eshel produced, directed and co-wrote with her partner Roger Schatz, who also narrated the doc. She traveled to New York, Washington, D.C. and Israel for countless interviews with Holocaust experts, people who knew McDonald and family members.

She used local crews for the interviews and credits New York DP Dennis Bonni, and audio engineer Andy Kuester for their excellent work.

James Demas of [SPI-TV Media Group](#), who started editing in July last year and finished in February, says his eyes were opened as he went through the material. “I was amazed at what McDonald had accomplished in saving Jewish lives.

“He was the first official American to recognize Hitler as a madman and started the call to awaken the world about him. Maybe someone will make a feature film about him, his story is that fascinating.”

SPI-TV produced additional titles and effects work by Ryan Duff and Rogelio Gazga. (Demas and Gazga are SPI-TV partners.) See the trailer [here](#).

“A Voice” has been entered in several international festivals and Eschel has approached the Holocaust Museum in Skokie to host its Midwest premiere.

Eshel’s award-winning [Cavalcade Productions](#) is one of the local film industry’s few WBE certified women-owned companies. It produces the full gamut of visual content, including commercials, marketing and training videos.

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