

BLESSED IS THE MATCH

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF HANNAH SENESH

SYNOPSIS

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honor's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

- Hannah Senesh, days before her capture by the Nazis

Narrated by three-time Academy Award nominee Joan Allen, *Blessed Is the Match* is the first documentary feature about Hannah Senesh, the World War II-era poet and diarist who became a paratrooper, resistance fighter and modern-day Joan of Arc.

Safe in Palestine in 1944, Hannah joined a mission to rescue Jews in her native Hungary. Shockingly, it was the only military rescue mission for Jews during the Holocaust. Hannah parachuted behind enemy lines, was captured, tortured and ultimately executed by the Nazis. Incredibly, her mother Catherine witnessed the entire ordeal – first as a prisoner with Hannah and later as her advocate, braving the bombed-out streets of Budapest in a desperate attempt to save her daughter.

Through interviews, eyewitness accounts and the prolific writings of Hannah and Catherine Senesh, *Blessed Is the Match* recreates Hannah's mission and imprisonment. The film also explores events in Hannah's childhood and outside her life, resulting in a rich portrait with several interlocking strands:

- It reveals British-controlled Palestine during the war and explores the Kibbutz Movement, which drew Hannah and other idealistic Jews there in the hopes of building a Jewish state. Israeli President Shimon Peres, who knew Hannah as a young pioneer in the 1940s, appears on camera.
- It retraces the perilous mission of Hannah and 31 other Jewish-Palestinian parachutists. Two of Hannah's fellow parachutists, Reuven Dafni and Surika Braverman, along with renowned historian Sir Martin Gilbert, appear on camera and recount the mission's aims, successes and failures.
- Finally, through Hannah's diary entries and poetry – and through her correspondence with her mother – it looks back on the life of a uniquely talented and complex girl who came of age in a world descending into madness. "God, may there be no end," Hannah writes in her 1942 poem *Eli Eli*, "to sea, to sand, water's splash, lightning's flash. The prayer of man."

Blessed Is the Match is a gripping, dramatic and heartbreaking story that has never been told as a documentary feature. In addition, while Hannah Senesh is a figure of great renown in Israel, she is largely unknown in the rest of the world. The filmmakers have interviewed the few remaining survivors who knew Hannah – her classmates at a Budapest girls' school, her fellow kibbutz members in Palestine and prisoners from Hannah's time in a Gestapo jail in the summer of 1944. The filmmakers have also been given unprecedented access to the Senesh family archive – including hundreds of unpublished letters and over 1,300 never-before-seen photos of remarkable quality.

Blessed Is the Match honors Hannah's legacy, but also captures her motivations and illuminates her faults as well as her strengths in an effort to explain why she chose to act against such monolithic evil. Finally, by using the raw and revelatory memoirs and letters of Catherine Senesh as the film's emotional core and as a counterpoint to Hannah's youthful writings, *Blessed Is the Match* becomes more than a canonizing tribute to a fallen heroine. In the end, it becomes a moving mother-daughter story.