

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PRESENTS
A FILM BY ROBERT JENSEN & NADEEM UDDIN

Abe Osheroff:

One Foot in the Grave, the Other Still Dancing

“My ship is slowly sinking, but my cannons keep firing. Or, here’s another way to say it: I have one foot in the grave and the other keeps dancing”

-Abe Osheroff

Running Time: 46 Minutes

For interviews or to arrange speaking engagements, please contact:
Robert Jensen | Producer
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FLIM SYNOPSIS

Most people knew Abe Osheroff as an activist. For most of his 92 years - from the frontlines of the Spanish Civil War to the picket lines of the U.S. labor movement, from the struggles for civil rights in Mississippi to his work for human rights in Nicaragua - Osheroff threw himself into the fray with rare energy and enthusiasm. In this riveting and inspiring new film, Osheroff reflects on the meaning of his activism, exploring the ideas that animated his actions and sharing wisdom built up over a lifetime of commitment to the "radical humanism" that defined his politics and philosophy.

"Nadeem Uddin's documentary of Abe Osheroff presents us with a great man I think not possible to envision in our present generation."

- Edward Asner | Emmy Award-winning film and television actor and former Screen Actors Guild president

"Much as *One Foot in the Grave* is the story of Osheroff's life, it's also a probing and unflinching look at the philosophy behind that life -- a philosophy that demands peace instead of war, human cooperation instead of exploitation."

- Barbara J. Berg | Author of *Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future*

"In a world driven by fear, Osheroff was one of those rare people willing to tell you to your face what he thought of you, and then turn that scrutiny on himself... Osheroff demonstrated what it meant to love the world deeply enough to be willing to tell the truth."

- Robert Jensen | Professor of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin

CREDITS

Producers: Robert Jensen and Nadeem Uddin

Associate Producer: Laurel Levasheff

Camera/Editing: Nadeem Uddin

Original Score: David Brunn, Tonewheel Records

Still Photography: Mississippi Matt Herron

Archival Footage: Dreams and Nightmares Abe Osheroff/Larry Klingman, Between the Wars

Scott Garen Director Alan Landsburg Productions, Spanish Civil War Reunion Spain (1996)

Gunnel Clark

Special Acknowledgement: Gunnel Clark, Anthony Geist, Joe Colgan, Howard Gale, Jim Page,

Martin Espada, Eduardo Galeano,

Project Development: Joy Shane Laughter, Kay Taylor

BIOGRAPHY

Abe Osheroff was born into a movement in history in which fascism, socialism, and capitalism were locked in a struggle for the world. He threw himself into those battles, always on the side of liberation. At times he picked up a gun, but more often his weapons were energy as an organizer and eloquence as a philosopher. From the Spanish Civil War to the contemporary antiwar movement in the United States, Osheroff has been on the front lines trying to change the world in the face of the greed and violence of the powerful. But those experiences also changed Osheroff over the years. With every activist endeavor, Osheroff sharpened his analysis and deepened his sense of the world. In his 90's, with "one foot in the grave and the other still dancing," as he puts it, Abe Osheroff speaks from the heart and with humility about an amazing life in a crucial time in history.

NOTABLE QUOTES

"So how do 'stay more alive' becomes center? And I personally as a being cannot be more alive. The opposite is happening to me. The only way I can stay more alive is through you, is through that young person. It's through other people. Without that I'm just going to be a bag of ashes."

"Hitler was the epitome of all the things I had been fighting against all my life. And to become involved with Spain was just another step in the direction which my life had been going. The Spanish people were at war with fascism. Here was my chance to join the fight. One night, together with two hundred and fifty other volunteers, I sailed for Spain."

"...at a very young age I learned that solidarity is love in action"

ABOUT THE FILM MAKERS & DISTRIBUTOR

Robert Jensen is a professor in the School of Journalism and director of the Senior Fellows Honors Program of the College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to his academic career, he worked as a professional journalist for a decade. At UT, Jensen teaches courses in media law, ethics, and politics. In his research, Jensen draws on a variety of critical approaches to media and power. Much of his work has focused on pornography and the radical feminist critique of sexuality and men's violence, and he also has addressed questions of race through a critique of white privilege and institutionalized racism. His opinion and analytic pieces on such subjects as foreign policy, politics, and race have appeared in papers and on websites around the world. He can be reached at rjensen@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Nadeem Uddin was born in Bhopal, India, Nadeem Uddin attended film school in the U.S. and resides in the Pacific Northwest. He has produced and photographed programs for Indian television and social activist organizations in India and the U.S. His passionate work on the subject of the long term effects of the 1984 Union Carbide gas leak disaster in Bhopal, India, landed him a place as one of the producers of "Bhopal: The Search for Justice," a documentary which premiered on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's The Nature of Things in December, 2004. As a stand-alone film, backed by the National Film Board of Canada and Société Radio Canada, "Bhopal: The Search for Justice" was selected for screening at the Amnesty International Festivals in London, New York and Los Angeles; the Festival Internacional de Cinema e Video Ambiental [FICA] in Goia, Brazil, where it won the 2005 Wolf Jesco von Puttkamer Award for Best Medium Length Documentary; and is being shown on the Sundance Film Channel 2005-06.

The **Media Education Foundation** produces and distributes documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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The Carpenter Swam to Spain
for Abe Osheroff and the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade
By Martin Espada

The ship hushed the waves to sleep at midnight:
Ciudad de Barcelona, Ciudad de Barcelona.

In the name of the aristocrat strolling through his garden
Franco's tanks crawled like a plague of smoldering beetles;
in the name of the bishop and his cathedrals
the firing squads sang a stuttering mass with smoke in their throats;
in the name of the exiled king and blueshirts on the march
bombers with swastika fins sowed an inferno
in village marketplaces and the ribs of the dead.
At Guernica an ancient woman in black stumbled
across a corpse and clawed her hair;
at Víznar, where the spring bubbles, a poet in white shoes
coughed the bullets' blood onto his white shirt,
gypsy sobbing in the cave of his mouth.

Ciudad de Barcelona: The ship plowed the ocean,
and the ocean was a wheatfield thinking of bread.
And the faces at the portholes thinking: Spain.

In España, the carpenters and miners kneeled with rifles
behind a barricade of killed horses,
the peasant boys cradled grenades like pomegranates
to fling against the plague of tanks, the hive of helmets.
Elsewhere on the earth, thousands more laid hammers
in toolboxes, holstered drills, promised letters home,
and crowded onto ships for Spain:
volunteers for the Republic, congregation of berets,
fedoras and fist-salutes for the camera, cigarettes and union songs.
The handle of the hammer became the stock of the rifle.

The ship called *Ciudad de Barcelona* steamed
across the thumping tide, hull bearded with foam,
the body of Spain slumbering on the horizon.

Another carpenter read the newspapers
by the tunnel-light of the subway in Brooklyn.
Abe Osheroff sailed for Spain. Because Franco's mustache
was stiff as a paintbrush with his cousins' blood;

because Hitler's iron maw would be a bulldozer,
heaving a downpour of cadavers into common graves.

The ship of volunteers was *Ciudad de Barcelona*,
Abe the carpenter among them, and for them
the word Barcelona tingled like the aftertaste of a kiss.
Two miles from shore, they saw the prop plane hover
as if a spectre from the last war,
the pilot's hand jab untranslated warning.
Then the thud, a heart kicking in spasm,
the breastbone of the ship punctured
by a torpedo from Mussolini's submarine.
In seven minutes, the ship called *Ciudad de Barcelona*
tilted and slid into the gushing sea,
at every porthole a face trapped,
mouth round and silent like the porthole.

Eighty mouths round in the high note of silence.
Schultz, captain of the Brooklyn College swim team,
pinned below deck and drowned,
his champion's breaststroke flailing.
Other hands that could swim burst through the wave-walls
and reached for the hands that could not. The boats
of a fishing village crystallized from the foam,
a fleet of saints with salt glistening in their beards,
blankets and rum on the shore.

Abe swam two miles to Spain,
made trowels of his hands
to cleave the thickening water.
His fingers learned the rifle's trigger
as they knew the hammer's claw.
At Fuentes de Ebro, armageddon
babbled and wailed above the trenches;
when he bled there, an ocean of shipwreck
surged through his body. Today, his white beard
is a garland of clouds and sea-foam,
and he remembers Schultz, the swimmer.

Now, for Abe, I tap these words
like a telegraph operator
with news of survivors:
Ciudad de Barcelona, Ciudad de Barcelona.