

ADR PRODUCTIONS
Presents

Agnès Jaoui

NINA'S HOME

A film by
Richard Dembo

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TFM DISTRIBUTION

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International sales



INTERNATIONAL

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On May 24th, 2004, one month before filming began, Richard Dembo wrote of his project:

“Telling this story today – of these homes and the children who lived in them – is a profound necessity.

May all those for whom this narrative is the story of their survival forgive me for the liberties I have taken in bringing it back to life. This fiction is quite likely the only way for me to come to terms with my own difficulty with being fully alive today.”

Synopsis

Children's homes were created in the emergency of the Liberation to provide shelter for kids without families, kept in hiding in France during the war, and as of June 1945, for deported children, survivors of the concentration camps.

Children in the thousands were restored to life there... from Elie Wiesel to Georges Perec.

The action of our film takes place between September 1944 and January 1946. In telling the story of how we learn to hope and live again in the wake of catastrophe and ruin, we are not making a film about the past, but about the future.

It is a hymn to life – to the joy of being alive.

- Richard Dembo

Interview with Producers Alain Rozanes and Pascal Verroust

What led you to produce Richard Dembo's film?

Alain Rozanes: We didn't know Richard, but we'd seen one of his films: *Dangerous Moves*. I also used to run into him at the film ratings commission, where we were both sitting members. One day, he called me up and said he had some things he'd like to propose to me. It had been twelve years since he'd made a film, although he'd received advances on several projects. Everyone seemed to think producing Richard Dembo would be a difficult task. But we didn't want to get into those issues. So we met with him – Pascal and I.

Pascal Verroust: And above all, he showed up with two fantastic ideas...

... and one of them was *Nina's Home*?

A.R.: Yes. He hadn't written anything yet, but he told us about it – not the story of *Nina's Home*, but the context of those kids who were taken into children's homes. A context neither Pascal nor I knew about – that very few people know about, as we found out later.

P.V.: That was what was really surprised us: not knowing about that context. We could tell we were faced with something we'd completely overlooked. The very idea that children came back from the camps seemed so impossible to us. But when you do the research and you read the earliest news articles about the liberation of Buchenwald, they talk about those children. From the very beginning, people knew about it.

In addition to those children who survived the camps, the “homes of hope” also offer an innovative angle for exploring a period of history otherwise very well known...

A.R.: In the beginning, those homes weren't intended for the deported children, but for children whose parents had been arrested and sent away to concentration and extermination camps. Those children had initially been kept in hiding by French families spread out all over France, so the homes were a way of regrouping them.

P.V.: With the idea that it allowed the deported parents who returned to find them more easily. And also, of restoring some of the kids' sense of identity. Because some of them had completely lost their identity.

The film tells us that these homes existed up until the 1960's. Why so long?

P.V.: Not all of the kids left right away. And little by little, the homes transformed into what they had been before the war: homes for social work, to help Jewish families in difficulty. The homes had been closed down during the war, around 1942, when it became evident that it was dangerous to regroup those children. It was only when French territory began to be liberated – as the beginning of the film explains – that the homes were opened up again.

Did the film require a lot of research?

A.R.: Many of the film's characters actually existed. Richard knew their story, one way or another: from having read things about them, or from knowing them on a more or less personal basis. Richard was a close friend of Georges Perec, who had been in hiding as a child during the war. And there's a child in the film named Georges... There's also Elie Wiesel, whose nickname was Leiser, and who appears in the film as well. From what Richard told us, he had been preoccupied with this story for a very long time. He was Jewish himself; his family came from Eastern Europe. And as a kid, he'd gone to summer camps in those places, in what used to be those homes. So he knew the place.

How closely did you follow the evolution of the script?

A.R.: Right away, Richard came up with the basic storyline. We were really impressed that he was able to create that first draft of the script in little more than a month. After that, we worked fourteen months to come up with the final version. We're used to working with all of our authors, but we'd never read as many versions as we did with Richard. Each new draft wasn't necessarily all that different from the others, but he insisted that we read them all! The problem was in finding the right structure, so that all those characters could exist and at the same time have flesh and emotion. That's where Richard needed us.

P.V.: Richard's approach to emotions wasn't simple. If you watch his first two films, *Dangerous Moves* and *L'Instinct de l'Ange*, you can see he was someone who held back when it came to feelings, who had a hard time letting himself go. We analyzed his first two films together, shot by shot nearly, and we had him work on that. He was so afraid of making things overly sentimental that he needed to be reassured. We promised him, "Don't worry, we'll tell you if it's too much. We'll hold you back." That's when he started fleshing out the characters. Considering the subject, the idea of laying on the drama too heavily scared us all, but we had to find the right balance.

Inside Nina's home, the religious convictions of some clash with the political convictions of others...

A.R.: I'm not sure this confrontation actually existed. I believe there were two kinds of homes: homes that tended to be religious, and homes with a socio-communist orientation. It was Richard who made the two coexist. But that's not important. I think the film gives a realistic vision of the period through those two approaches that emerged at the end of the war: a religious approach and the communist approach, which had long since developed among the Zionists already.

P.V.: Why does Richard talk about that in the film? Because he's talking about how those young people were restored to life, how they could only rebuild themselves from foundations they had in common. On one side, the children from Eastern Europe had their religious traditions; on the other, the children that had been in hiding and the supervisors – who were generally French and politically on the left – had Communism. But in both cases, it's an instinct: they needed an ideal, whatever that might be, to rebuild themselves and live again.

An instinct we see in Nina. What matters to her is not so much religion itself, but finding a way to convey something through religious traditions...

A.R.: Yes. Nina instinctively realizes that giving those traditions back to the children might get them out of their lethargic state. It's not an ideal to her. She'd never have done that on her own. But those kids have nothing left; they've been destroyed by the horrors they've lived through.

P.V.: When Nina faces the candles and says, "My grandmother used to do this," we feel how moved she is. But what moves her is not so much the religious meaning of those gestures as the fact that they come from her childhood, that they're a link to her grandmother. That's the whole meaning of the Shabbat scene. Something important happens, but it's not in the moment of the first prayer. It's during the song, when the two groups find themselves singing together: it's the first time there's any real communication among the group as a whole. It's in that song that the deported children are finally able to express something. And that's when they drive away the one who'll never be able to come back from the camps: Gustav.

The long tracking shot, in which the deported children arrive from the camps, is one of the most emotionally revealing moments Richard Dembo dares to create.

A.R.: Richard wanted to show that train like that, in a fairly tight, very long tracking shot. After the dialogue between Nina and the German colonel, the arrival of those children is a really important moment. Those kids aren't in as tragic a physical state as Nina thought they'd be. The imagery we're faced with is not the kind we would expect. But we shouldn't forget, and the film reminds of this, that these young people arrive only six weeks after the liberation of the camps; during that time they'd been fed, which has attenuated the signs of physical deterioration. Even so, they're broken in spirit. We see that in certain hallucinatory gazes of theirs. They'd remained at Buchenwald during those six weeks because the Americans didn't know what to do with them; they really thought that the children were so traumatized they would become delinquents, savages. De Gaulle decided France would take in 200 of them. An honorable gesture on his part. We mustn't forget that it wasn't a homecoming for those children. They'd never seen France before. That tracking shot is like a suspension in the course of History...

P.V.: That's it – exactly. That suspended time in the train scene corresponds to a moment of questioning that overwhelms Nina and the supervisors. They're asking themselves, what will these kids be like? Will they still be human? Will they be ghosts? For me, there are two other moments like that in the film: when Nina sees film footage of the camps, and when the children learn that reality from the newspaper. Each time, we experience the horror those characters face – from their point of view. As for us, we know that History, that story; we've seen those images. But the film tells the story of people who, at a certain point in time, discover that horror as something completely unimaginable to them.

A.R.: What matters is seeing Nina discover the film footage of the camps, not the film footage itself. We also shouldn't forget that when Nina sees those images, at the same time she is also learning that her parents are most likely dead.

On one side, we see the pain of the deported children, then there's the pain of the children in hiding as well...

A.R.: Yes, we mustn't forget the children in hiding. Especially since they were a bit left behind by History, that other side of History being such an enormity. But those children, five to fifteen years old, also feel the pain of losing everything at once – when they learn their parents are dead.

The film also tells the story of how life can still go on, even after...

A.R.: Richard showed us a contemporary Canadian documentary about what had become of certain children who'd survived the camps. It played a significant part in our work and made a huge difference to us: almost all of them had made it through. They'd created new lives and families for themselves; they had lived on. That's what first motivated me to produce this film: to give hope to all children all over the world, to tell them, "Even if you've suffered enormously, you can make it through if someone offers you a helping hand, if someone gives you love." Because today, there are hells other than those lived through by the children in *Nina's Home*: Rwanda, Cambodia... the list is endless.

How did you make the choice of Agnès Jaoui for the role of Nina?

A.R.: We worked 14 months on the script, and we talked about actors from time to time, but mostly we just worked on the script. When we were done, we still hadn't found the actress for our Nina. Then one week after finishing, Richard calls me and says: "Agnès Jaoui." And I answered, "Of course, that's it – exactly." We immediately called her agent and asked him to read the screenplay as soon as possible. Which he did, and we're extremely grateful to him

for that. 24 hours later, he called us back to tell us he thought it was magnificent and that he was going to get it to Agnès right away. The next day, Agnès had read the screenplay and told us that she couldn't even imagine not doing the film. From then on, the financing started coming in. For us, as producers, it was an incredible challenge and a great joy – because the whole thing was put together so quickly. It was already February, and if we wanted to shoot within the year, it had to be between June 28th and August 30th, because of the kids' school vacation. Which meant putting the film together in two months. Which seemed impossible to us. At first, we said to ourselves we'd shoot in June... of the following year... unless a miracle happened. We jumped straight into preparatory work before we had the financing, which came in gradually: TFM DISTRIBUTION, TF1, the state loan subsidy, Région Ile de France, Canal +, TPS, and support from the Foundation for the Memory of Shoah. With each step, we made it over another hurdle that brought us closer to making the film.

You preferred that risk to the alternative of waiting another year to make the film?

A.R.: In retrospect, you could say it would've been a different story, that the film wouldn't have existed, because Richard has since passed away.

How did you find the house for *Nina's Home*?

P.V.: That's one of the most beautiful stories about the film. The person who did the location scouting came in with photos, and we all immediately agreed upon one of them, which had all the ideal characteristics. And when they visited the house – which was nearly abandoned – Richard realized he was in the house where he'd shot *Dangerous Moves*! He called us – he was in tears.

He hadn't recognized it in the photo?

A.R.: No, because at the time, the house was inhabited. The park was too.

P.V.: If you follow the script, the layout of that house corresponds to the location descriptions.

A.R.: It was in his head all along! It's quite probable he unconsciously projected his story into that house when he was writing.

What was Richard Dembo's experience of the shoot after a 12-year break?

A.R.: I think it was a little like a first film for him. Every director who begins a film is afraid, but in this case he was really afraid: afraid of not knowing anymore. He hadn't yet got his bearings back, his reflexes back. But after a week of shooting, it all came back to him.

A.R.: We were there on the shoot almost every day. Richard needed us to reassure him. It was a real pleasure to see him there with all those children, and Agnès in the middle. I was there on the last day with the children and it was absolutely incredible: they were crying because they didn't want to leave; we were crying, Agnès was in tears and the other actors were, too. Meanwhile, Richard was shooting. When he'd finished, he came out and saw us all like that, and asked us, "What's happened to you all?" It was extraordinary to see all those children so moved, especially considering they'd sacrificed their whole summer vacation to do the film.

P.V.: It was a wonderful gift. But Richard was the happiest of us all. He had proved to everyone, and to himself, that he could do it.

A.R.: We'd never felt that so strongly on a film. We were extremely moved by the thought that without us, perhaps the film wouldn't have seen the light.

P.V.: We had the impression that we'd got back in touch with what we'd lost some time ago, with the very source of what got us into this business: namely, a powerful project and a real human encounter.

Richard Dembo passed away before he could finish editing the film...

A.R.: We were shattered by his death. For ten days, we sat there with our arms hanging down, unable to move. We'd been so high with joy.

P.V.: You can't imagine how brutal it was. My first reaction was to say, "It's crazy to have made this film and then come to this."

A.R.: After that, we began to think of the good times, at the end of the shoot. He was so happy. We'd wanted to make other films with Richard, including an adaptation of *Lucien Leuwen*. So we got the whole post-production crew together and said to them: "We're going to ask something of you and it's not always going to be easy, but we'll live through it together." That's what happened. We had to hang on. Especially Isabelle Devinck, the editor. In an editing room, there's an intimacy that develops between the director and the editor; so many things are expressed.

At what stage of the editing did it happen?

A.R.: When Richard died, we had a first edit, what we call a "bear". That first rough cut, 2'38" long, gave us a good idea of the spirit of the film; it left me in tears. But the fact was we still had two months of editing scheduled. Other than that 2'38" version, Richard had come up with a version that ran 2'15".

P.V.: And between the two, we'd spent two days with him in the editing room talking about the 2'38" version, scene by scene. Isabelle had written down everything we said, and that contributed a lot to making the final version as close as possible to what Richard wanted. But it's true that we all had doubts when Richard died. We all asked ourselves if we had the right to continue. It's a real question that we all asked ourselves: did we have the right to touch that version of the film?

How did you resolve the dilemma?

P.V.: If a painter leaves behind an unfinished painting, you can see it. But you can't leave a film unfinished: it doesn't exist. This film had come so near to completion that we had to see it through to the end and have it shown. Still, we were filled with fear: fear of making mistakes, of disfiguring Richard's film.

Can you give specifics as to how the editing was completed?

A.R.: We came together as a team to support Isabelle: Richard's wife Jessica, Pascal and I. Agnès Jaoui came in regularly to give us her advice, which we valued dearly. We also asked in Jean-Paul Rappeneau and Constantin Costa Gavras once or twice, because we knew Richard had intended to do that.

P.V.: Isabelle Devinck played a vital role in the completion of the film. What she went through was amazing. Without our director, we were all orphans. But in the editing room, she was solid as a rock. This film is very close to how Richard would have imagined it when he passed away. What we don't have, and never will, is what he could have invented between the images. We don't know where his ideas would have taken him. But it is his film – in the deepest sense.

P.V.: After two years working with a director, you get to know what the spirit of his film is. I think we headed, as truthfully as we could, towards what he wanted.

P.V.: Once we'd completed the film, Isabelle went off to plant peas in the desert. She had the wisdom to go do something totally crazy, and at the same time, totally human – maybe to find that source that allows our little presence on earth to have some kind of meaning. It's probably encountering rare people like her, who have passions, strengths, convictions and ideals, that made me want to bounce back after Richard passed away.

Interview with Agnès Jaoui

How did you get involved in the project?

My agent Jean-François Gabard had the script sent to me. I started crying at page ten, when Nina goes to get little Jules-Marie from the couple that's been hiding him. When I closed the script, I said to myself that I couldn't say no – and that was it. At the same time, the religious aspect did eventually pose a problem for me. I met Richard Dembo and told him right away: "Let me make one thing perfectly clear: I am absolutely not religious." He answered, "Nobody's perfect!" and we had a good laugh. For me, Nina is a character who is not religious, and he confirmed that to me. It was important that we be in agreement about that; religion is one solution for those children but not THE solution.

Nina goes through the gestures of religious tradition without bestowing religious value upon them. It's more of a ritual to get the children back in touch with their roots.

That's exactly it, and that's what I liked so much about the film. The film really tells the story of how to learn to live again after the horror, how to find meaning in life again; it can be through a religious ideal or through a political ideal... I've seen photos taken in those homes. The children laugh; life prevails. It's that question of resilience that Boris Cyrulnik talks about. That's why the film also tells the story of any genocide – even the genocides taking place right now. *Nina's Home* tells the story of handing down values, and recreating oneself anew.

How do you explain the fact that there has been so little talk about these "homes of hope" and the children who survived the camps?

I have no explanation and I think it's a shame. Just like I think there aren't enough films about how the Germans lived after their defeat – the former Nazis, or the ordinary Germans, led into the horror despite themselves. There's *Sophie's Choice* or *Welcome in Vienna*, but that's very little for such a rich subject. Whether you're on the side of the losers or the winners, the question's the same: how do you come back to life? I can only explain one thing: it obviously takes fifty years of denial before we can talk about the past. You can see that there's a time lapse, during which everyone's anaesthetized by their own guilt. And if the deported can't talk, it's also because we didn't want to or couldn't hear them. Our own guilt was too strong.

Did it touch you personally to participate in shedding light upon this aspect of war?

It touched me personally in the sense that I'm Jewish. But on the other hand, I'm a Tunisian Jew, so we didn't experience things the same way at all, even if it's a part of history we share. I was also touched by the character of Nina. Even more so because this woman actually existed, because I've met her and she's incredible. When Nina looks at you, it's really you she's looking at: the human being. She doesn't give a damn who you are, what you do; she's not afraid of other people. She talks about things with no drama. It's powerful to realize that people like her exist. I really wanted to take on that kind of role, but it wasn't easy.

What wasn't easy about it?

Playing a good person! Goodness is so interior. It's the first time I've played a character who's nice, maternal, nurturing... It's not as simple as acting mean or having emotional outbursts. In the film, Nina is good from beginning to end; you can't rely on a movement, an evolution. To be in character, I constantly felt the need to have objects in my hands, to be doing things, to be working on something. But that's not what Richard wanted. He was looking for something more static, which corresponds to the way he composes his shots. All you have to do is watch *Dangerous Moves* to understand that Richard's directing style relies

on a hierarchical structure, and of course I adapted to that. But it was harder for me to act that way. There was also the question of drama, of getting the right dose of tears and feelings. Like when Nina first sees the film footage of the camps...

You seemed to have opted for “less” rather than “too much” drama...

Yes, because Niny is like that, and that’s how I saw the character. Nina doesn’t have time for self-pity; she always has practical matters to resolve. She’s in charge of 60 kids; that’s a lot of work. That also helps keep her from breaking down. Nina doesn’t have children of her own, but that doesn’t mean she doesn’t know how to draw the line between herself and those children who aren’t hers. She’s everyone’s mother, and at the same time, she’s no one’s mother. She doesn’t confuse her role with that of a real mother.

How did the experience of working with kids go?

I’d already had that experience with the two little girls in *Une Femme d’Extérieur*. It was different, but I’d already had the pleasure of working with kids. It’s exhausting, but it’s also rejuvenating. Kids have varying degrees of skill and concentration, but they bring life into the acting and I like that a lot. They’re the opposite of the type of actress that I am. I tend to be cerebral, whereas they don’t think. They go a hundred miles an hour; they require you to adapt. At the same time, it’s fascinating to see how they already know the tricks of the trade; they’re already little actors. It was also funny to listen to them talk about the business. Some of them said to me, “To be an actor, you have to go to an agent, right?” I wanted to answer, “Yes but you know, you’ve got to take acting classes first!” But actually, it’s true that that’s the way it happens with kids. They often get thrown into it when they’re little. They get into the business by doing films. There were some of them who’d done more films than I have!

How were the children cast for the film?

At first, Richard searched just about everywhere, with the help of Nora Habib and Brigitte Moidon, but he realized that he also needed kids who really spoke Yiddish, who knew the traditions... So he found a lot of them in a religious school. In the beginning, they were almost as suspicious as their characters are when they show up at Nina’s home. But it wasn’t long before we had conversations about everything: What is anti-Semitism? What is religion? What is belief? What is being open to others? It was a very meaningful exchange, and at the end of the shoot, when they came to say goodbye to me, I just couldn’t stop crying. The boys looked at me and said, “Are you crying?” But I wasn’t the only one to cry. We were all weeping like willows. *Nina’s Home* was the most moving shoot I’ve ever been on; a lot of that was really really because of them.

But also because of the subject?

What’s bizarre is that the emotion didn’t come from where we expected it would. Almost immediately on the shoot, we forgot the reality of what our characters represented. It was like, “The deported children on the left, the children in hiding on the right.” For those children, all that happened generations ago. Of course they knew; we’d talked about it and it was completely present, but in an undramatic way. On the other hand, what was so moving and surprising was how the current religious context came up. When the religious children left at night, they were dressed in ordinary street clothes, like kids, with baseball caps over their kippas. I later understood that they were hiding their kippas because of possible problems they might encounter in their neighborhoods. We also sensed how their relationship with religion could sometimes be problematic, when I was wearing a low-cut blouse, or on Friday nights, when we had little parties on the set and certain kids didn’t come because they were observing Shabbat. And of course they ate kosher as well. There were Muslims on the crew who ended up being more attached to the little ones than just about anyone else. Anyway, the

difficulties of living together with different beliefs and customs showed up on the shoot for real. It was troubling.

Reading the script, you weren't aware that the film would reverberate so strongly with contemporary issues?

Yes. I knew all that was still alive today, but I was thinking more in relation to the Shoah than I was in terms of how to live with religion today. I'm pretty much anti-religious, anti-integrationist, in fact. I think integrationism is truly dangerous, just as much in the Middle East as in Israel or in France. As a result, I tended to put all religious sentiment in the same basket. Still, it's true that on this film, I happened to see how religion could also give strength. Those children who came from the religious school had an impressive intellectual and cultural level. You could tell they were disciplined. Some of them may get messed up by that, but we shouldn't forget that study of the Torah is above all a study of dialectics, of questioning. It was quite remarkable to find out that we could talk about everything with them. There were no taboos. I remember a conversation at the dinner table about foreskin and the symbolic meaning of cutting it off! It was funny. We even had conversations about pleasure, about virginity. All that makes you think about religion: when does it make you closed-minded and Sectarian, and when does it give you stability and make you tolerant?

In the film, there's no hierarchy of pain between the children who'd survived the camps and the children who'd been in hiding...

When we met Niny, she did actually say to us at one point, "we didn't listen enough to the children in hiding." But it's true that that's not the story the film tells... Then again, Nina tells the children in hiding to be tolerant with the children from the camps, and that they have to observe Shabbat for them... In that respect, they're a little bit "privileged."

You showed up often during the final edit...

Yes, since the editing was still in progress when Richard died. When we learned of his death, we all got together, including the children. We needed to see each other, to be together. After that, I left the country for two weeks, and when I got back, there was a 2'10" cut in addition to Richard's long version. I told the producers and Jessica, Richard's wife, that I wanted to help with the editing, but I made it clear that it would remain Richard's film and that I didn't want to appear in the credits. I was happy to do it, first of all because I love editing, whether it's for my own films or for films of my friends. I often stop in to see them at that moment. In the editing stage, you bring something back to life. That was even truer with *Nina's Home*. It felt like I was seeing Richard again, like we were extending the adventure of his film. It felt nice to be reunited around that editing table. Even if the last week became a bit more complicated, because final decisions had to be made and weren't mine to make, since Jessica had the "final cut."

Do you ever see the children from the film now?

Yes, quite often. They call me and we get together. They're great. The bonds that grew between us were real. Of course, the fact we were together in that house all the time and that we lived two and a half months together, from day to day, helped. It felt a little like summer camp; at night, we'd stay out on the lawn and play the guitar. The influence you can have over kids when you're an adult is fascinating, gratifying, nourishing, moving, exhilarating. I'd never felt that so strongly before. My brother joked around with me and said, "So you're starting up a summer camp?" – Could be!

Interview with Niny Cohen

What led you to work in children's homes?

In June 1940, my family and I left our little village near Strasbourg, 25 kilometers from the Maginot Line, to take refuge in Auvergne. When I finished high school, I wanted to study medicine but couldn't, because of the *numerus clausus*. So I figured I'd follow the example of certain friends of mine from Strasbourg, kindergarten teachers who'd been working since the beginning of the Occupation in refugee camps set up in southwest France to give shelter to Jewish foreign refugees. As early as we possibly could, we managed to get a good number of children out of those camps and place them in children's homes created for that purpose – primarily by the OSE, l'Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants (Children's Rescue Works). They were short on personnel and told me they'd be ready to hire me once I'd finished a work training session in teaching and kindergarten.

Who exactly were the “children in hiding”?

Children whose parents had disappeared; we didn't know they'd been deported yet. We hid those children in various non-Jewish institutions and boarding schools, and in foster families, because it had become too dangerous to keep them together in the children's homes. Once the city of Lyon was liberated, and we could reunite them in groups again, the OSE progressively opened up about 25 more children's homes, and asked us – myself and a friend who also worked with the OSE, undercover – to take charge of one of those homes.

When was the OSE created?

It was created in the 1930's to give medical and social assistance to the refugees that came to France to escape Hitler. They also opened centers for children whose parents wanted them to get out of the big cities during school vacation. The name OSE comes from a Russian word, because the organization was founded in Russia. We used that word as the initials for l'Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants (Children's Rescue Works).

Are you the Nina in Richard Dembo's film?

No, and it would really bother me if anyone thought that! To make his film, Richard happened to read a lot of things and meet a lot of people, and some of them must of talked about me because they knew me. I may be one source of his inspiration, but that's as far as it goes.

So Richard Dembo wrote the script without meeting you first?

Yes. We saw each other once, at the beginning of the shoot, but that was mostly because he needed to confirm the authenticity of what he'd written about religious life in the home. And it was never my intention to make generalizations with what I told him, which was specific to my group and the way I felt about things. I've always been wary of setting down a fixed representation of things, especially on when it comes to those young people, adults today; certain of them might consider it a betrayal to talk about them. When Elie Wiesel writes, he writes what he lived through himself. Whereas I tend to keep things to myself.

But in a certain sense, it was also your story...

A lot of people say to me, “What? You lived through all that and you don’t write about it?” You can write about things when you’ve achieved a certain detachment. I’ve realized I don’t have that detachment. Those events had a very strong influence on my youth, and I realize I’ve never gotten over it. It’s still very much alive in me. And of course I wasn’t in those comes to just pick flowers! I was hired by an organization, to do a certain job... I myself don’t feel free.

Do you think Richard Dembo has achieved that in *Nina’s Home*?

The role of a witness is one thing; the role of an artist who creates is another. As a witness, I have to be careful what I say, to avoid speaking foolishly or inappropriately. But I’m the one who experiences it that way, because I’m a part of that story, because I had that relationship with those kids. Whereas the artist has the right to do what he wants to do with reality, so long as he doesn’t claim that it’s a documentary. In that case you’re looking at a work of art, at the vision of an artist who’s not obligated to be entirely realistic: it’s a re-creation.

How do you explain the fact that there has been relatively little talk about those homes and the children who survived and returned from the camps?

I have no explanation. It was, after all, the ultimate example of the horror - those surviving children who were sometimes the only ones remaining to represent an entire family. Maybe it was easier for Americans to talk about it because they didn’t know the terrors we lived through. We couldn’t just fall back into the recollection of that war and its suffering right away. We had to begin by breathing, by seeing the world more peacefully, without feeling we were losing or winning, vengeful or suspicious. That’s also true for the survivors themselves. And also, at the OSE, we remained discreet for fear we would expose or stigmatize all those young people who had been entrusted to us.

The film shows us that what mattered first was that life prevailed...

Yes, that the children run in the grass, in the country... What I really liked in Richard Dembo’s film were precisely those scenes in the garden with the children. When the film began and I saw that greenery, with those big trees, those ponds and those flowers, I truly recognized what I’d experienced myself. Children’s homes were generally chateaux that were built on vast parcels of land. The children’s home I worked in was even bigger than the one in the film. It was a chateau in Touraine, surrounded by greenery. You’d think you were in *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and it was magnificent. That space was even more important because those children had been locked up in barracks and no longer had families. Our relationship to nature is very important for the imagination: we feel bigger, less constricted inside.

How did you face those children who had experienced the horror?

By being without *a priori*, without prejudice. We had no theories; we were just there to listen to them, and we followed our sense of reason and our hearts. Foreign colleagues who came to see us were surprised: “You’re not surrounded by psychologists, by psychiatrists?” They thought we wouldn’t be able to treat it in a normal way. It is true that we never knew if what we were doing was good or bad, but we had to act, so we did, trying to be as vigilant and attentive as possible. We were there 24 hours a day and we gave it our all so they wouldn’t suffer from the absence of their parents. And that – I think they felt that. What they needed most was affection.

Weren't you afraid that some of the children wouldn't make it?

I never even asked myself the question! For me it was obvious they would make it. I'd been taught the Montessori method and I'd learned the essential: each individual is a priceless miracle and must be respected for who he or she is. From there, you can help anybody. It also has to be said that the humanity of those children was exceptional. They came out of a horrible place where they'd had to fight and kick everyone to survive, but they were never crude, brutal or cruel with us. We were more like big sisters to them.

In the film, however, we sometimes see the children fight, or throw rocks at German soldiers in revenge...

I never confronted that kind of hatred myself. But I didn't know all of those children... There must have been some who had a harder time rebuilding themselves than others. I think the children I took care of had had peaceful childhoods, which gave them a strength that nothing could take away from them.

Other than affection, what else do you think helped those children to rebuild themselves?

They'd seen the loss of their loved ones and their childhood ruined, but they'd also seen victory. That helps you to think it's worth it to hold on. And there was also the notion of kinship: they belonged to a community that had almost disappeared. But they were still there, and they wanted to show that by proving they were capable of functioning, working, going to school. It was like a challenge of sorts. And they took it on as a group. Children often deal with their troubles alone. In this case, they shared a destiny that gave them strength. They could say to themselves: "Here, they understand me – here, they know." What they lived through was completely beyond words.

In the film, the group finds unity through two different approaches: religion and politics...

Among the children who'd survived Buchenwald, there was a group of 80 that was truly very religious, and that's the group Judith and I were in charge of, because we were fairly religious ourselves, and also because we understood Yiddish. Some of those religious children became famous rabbis. But whether it's religion or politics, it's the same process, which consists of surpassing oneself for an ideal. That's where you realize just how much it's not weapons, but spirit that creates combativity.

Have you kept in touch with those young people you took care of?

With some of them, yes. It's always a joy for us to get together and talk. Two years ago, a former child in hiding called me and said: "Hello, is this Niny's house?" - "Yes, yes." - "Are you still alive?" For him, it seemed almost impossible. I was only 20 years old when I took care of him, but to him I was already an old woman back then! And when we saw each other again, I was still talking to him like he was a little boy, even though he was nearly 60 years old! It was as if I'd forgotten that time had passed.

AGNÈS JAOUÏ

Film (Actress)

- 2004 *COMME UNE IMAGE/LOOK AT ME* by Agnès JAOUÏ
LE RÔLE DE SA VIE/THE ROLE OF HER LIFE by François FAVRAT
- 2002 *24 HEURES DE LA VIE D'UNE FEMME/24 HOURS IN THE LIFE OF A WOMAN* by Laurent BOUHNİK
- 1999 *LE GOÛT DES AUTRES/IT TAKES ALL KINDS* by Agnès JAOUÏ
UNE FEMME D'EXTÉRIEUR by Christophe BLANC
- 1998 *ON THE RUN* by Bruno DE ALMEIDA
LE COUSIN by Alain CORNEAU
- 1997 *ON CONNAÎT LA CHANSON/SAME OLD SONG* by Alain RESNAIS
César Award 1998 for Best Actress in a Supporting Role
- 1996 *UN AIR DE FAMILLE* by Cédric KLAPISCH
LE DÉMÉNAGEMENT/MOVING OUT by Olivier DORAN
- 1992 *CUISINE ET DÉPENDANCES* by Philippe MUYL
- 1991 *CANTI* by M. PRADAL
- 1987 *HÔTEL DE FRANCE* by Patrice CHÉREAU
- 1983 *LE FAUCON* by Paul BOUJENAH

Director

- 2003 *COMME UNE IMAGE/LOOK AT ME*
Productions LES FILMS A4
- 1999 *LE GOÛT DES AUTRES/IT TAKES ALL KINDS*
Productions LES FILMS A4 / TÉLÉMA
César Awards 2001 for Best Film, Best Screenplay, Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Anne Alvaro) and Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Gérard Lanvin).
Academy Award Nominee 2001 for Best Foreign Film

Author

- 1997 *ON CONNAÎT LA CHANSON/SAME OLD SONG* by Alain RESNAIS
César Award 1998 for Best Screenplay
- 1996 *UN AIR DE FAMILLE* by Cédric KLAPISCH
Jury's Choice Award – People's Choice Award - Montréal 1996
César Award 1996 for Best Screenplay - César Nominee 1996 for Best Actor in a Supporting Role
- 1994 *SMOKING NO SMOKING* by Alain RESNAIS
César Award 1994
UN AIR DE FAMILLE Directed by S. MELDEGG
Molière Award 1995
- 1992 *CUISINE ET DÉPENDANCES* by Philippe MUYL
Directed by S. MELDEGG – Molière Award 1993

Theatre (Actress)

- 1994 *UN AIR DE FAMILLE*
by Agnès JAOUÏ and Jean-Pierre BACRI, Directed by S. MELDEGG
- 1991 *IVANOV*
Directed by P. ROMANS, Théâtre des Amandiers
CUISINE ET DÉPENDANCES
by Agnès JAOUÏ and Jean-Pierre BACRI, Directed by S. MELDEGG
- 1987 *L'ANNIVERSAIRE*
Directed by J.-M. RIBES, Théâtre Tristan BERNARD
PENTHÉSILÉE
Directed by P. ROMANS
PLATONOV
Directed by Patrice CHÉREAU
CHRONIQUE D'UNE FIN D'APRÈS-MIDI
Directed by P. ROMANS, Festival d'Avignon

RICHARD DEMBO

Assistant Director to Pierre Prévert, André Téchiné, Jacques Charron, Georges Stevens, Charles Jarrot, etc...

Director in Residence, Opéra de Paris

Under the administration of Rolf Liebermann, collaborates with Patrice Chéreau, Jorge Lavelli, Giorgio Strelher, Gunther Rennert, Henry Ronse, Jacques Fabbri, etc... and supervises three seasons of numerous repertory works with soloists including: Mirella Freni, Kiri Te Kanawa, Margareth Price, Martina Arroyo, Ileana Cotrubas, Grace Bumbry, Frederika Von Stadt, Gwentyeth Jones, Jon Vickers, Placido Domingo, Sherill Milnes, Samuel Ramey, Nicolai Ghayurov, José Van Dam etc.

Writer & Director

- 1984 *LA DIAGONALE DU FOU/DANGEROUS MOVES*
Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, Prix Louis Delluc, César Award for Best First Film, Golden
Globe Nominee
- 1991 *L'INSTINCT DE L'ANGE*

Director, Opera

LA BOHEME by Puccini - l'Opéra de Lille, La Fenice de Venise
THE TALES OF HOFFMAN by Offenbach - l'Opéra de Lille
THE MAGIC FLUTE by Mozart - Chorégie d'Orange, Théâtre Antique

Screenwriter

Collaboration with Jean-Daniel Pollet, Claude Pinoteau and Didier Le Pêcheur.
Consultant, seven sessions of Equinoxe at the Château de Beychevelles.

Author

- 1992 *L'INSTINCT DE L'ANGE & LA DIAGONALE DU FOU* - Editions Verdier
2002 *DIVA, DIVINA* - Editions Balland
2003 *LE POUVOIR DE L'ILLUSION* - Editions Balland
2004 *LE JARDIN VU DU CIEL* - Editions Verdier

Other

Co-founder of *LA QUINZAINE DE REALISATEURS* - Cannes Film Festival

Cast

Agnès Jaoui

Nina

Supervisors

Sarah Adler

Marlene

Katia Lewkowicz

Eva

Arié Elmaleh

Avner

Sébastien Knafo

Arié

Children in Hiding

Adèle Csech

Sylvie

Jeremy Sitbon

Georges

Vincent Rottiers

Gabriel

Alexis Pivot

Jean

Max Levy

Jules-Marie

Lola Naymark

Rosette

Claire Bouanich

Little Blond Girl

Arnaud Marciszewer

Scrawny Little Boy

Children from Buchenwald

Gaspard Ulliel

Izik

David Mambouch

Leiser

Arthur Moncla

Moshe

Gabriel Hallali

Herschel

Meïr Bloemhof

Schlome

Jonathan Aleksandrowicz

Aaron

Jeremias Nussbaum Schmelke

Special appearances by:

Charles Berling

Maurice Gutman

Gilles Gaston-Dreyfus

Jacques Goldstein

Michel Jonasz

Generous Donator

And featuring (in alphabetical order):

Jean-Pierre Becker	Anselme
Bernard Blancan	Emile
André Cavaillé	Photographer
Idit Cebula	Sylvie & Georges' Mother
Yann Collette	Colonel de Marcieu
Allen Hoist	Sandy
Tomas Le Marquis	Gustav
Philippe Morier-Genoud	Mr. Gelin
Elise Otzenberger	Helene
Hubert Saint-Macary	Station Master
Ken Samuels	Captain O'Leary
Vittoria Scognamiglio	Rosina
Gilles Segal	Dr. Weill
Véronika Varga	Fake Mother

Crew

Director	Richard Dembo
Screenplay	Richard Dembo
1st Assistant Director	Olivier Bouffard
Script Supervisor	Elisabeth Chochoy
Director of Photography	Laurent Fleutot
Sound Engineers	Michel Casang
	Jean Goudier
	Dominique Hennequin
	Christian Marti
Set Decorator	Eve-Marie Arnault
Wardrobe	Jackie Reynal
Makeup Artist	Bernard Friboulet
Hair Stylists	Stéphane Desmarest
	Isabelle Devinck
Editor	Brigitte Moidon
Casting	Nora Habib
	Marc Fontanel
Production Supervisor	Bruno Amestoy
Production Manager	Patrick Camboulive
Still Photographer	

ADR PRODUCTIONS

FEATURE FILMS

- 2005 *LA MAISON DE NINA/NINA'S HOME* by Richard Dembo
2004 *MÉMOIRE D'UN SACAGE/A SOCIAL GENOCIDE* by Fernando E. Solanas
À BOIRE/BOTTOMS UP by Marion Vernoux, Thomas Bidegain and Frédéric Jardin
VICTOIRE by Stéphanie Murat and Gilles Laurent
2003 *FUREUR/RAGE* by Karim Dridi
2002 *SATIN ROUGE/RED SATIN* by Raja Amari
UN MOMENT DE BONHEUR/A MOMENT OF HAPPINESS by Antoine Santana
PETITES MISERES/SHOPPING by Laurent Brandenbourger and Philippe Boon
2001 *REINES D'UN JOUR/A HELL OF A DAY* by Marion Vernoux
CUBA FELIZ by Karim Dridi
1999 *RIEN À FAIRE/EMPTY DAYS* by Marion Vernoux
1997/1998 *KARNAVAL* by Thomas Vincent
HORS JEU/FOUL PLAY by Karim Dridi
LES MIGRATIONS DE VLADIMIR by Milka Assaf
1996 *TABLEAU FERRAILLE* by Moussa Sene Absa
LE TESTAMENT DE MONSIEUR NAPUMOCENO DA SILVA DE ARAUJO/TESTAMENTO by Francisco Manso
1995 *BYE BYE* by Karim Dridi
1993 *L'HOMME SUR LES QUAIS/THE MAN ON THE SHORE* by Raoul Peck
RETOURS À BEYROUTH by Jean-Claude Codsì
1992-91 *HYÈNES/HYENAS* by Djibril Diop Manbétý
1991 *LA NUIT* by Mohamet Malasse

SHORT FILMS

- 1998 *POP CORN* by Yannick Rolanbyau
1997 *LA SOUPE (5')* by Antoine Santana - 35 mm
TO BE OR NOT TO BE by Pascale Auricoste - Super 16
1994 *LE BOXEUR ENDORMI* by Karim Dridi - 35mm - Dolby Stereo.
3000 SCÉNARIOS POUR UN VIRUS/3000 SCENARIOS TO COMBAT A VIRUS
Series of 8 short films for the prevention of AIDS
Directors: L.Heynemann, P.Boujenah, P.Lioret, C.Silvera,
B. Jacquot, J. Marboeuf, J. Renard and P. Volson

ADR Productions has also produced nearly one hundred documentaries.