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My first take at the 2010 Cleveland international Film Festival this year, I was first drawn to the movie by the idea of watching the enfoldment of one culture’s interpreting another’s by the means of artifacts only, having taught Ray Bradbury’s Martian Chronicles recently and frequently enjoying the depiction of the character who becomes engrossed with the remains of the Martian civilization. Also reminiscent of the way a physicist once described greeting cards sent to outer space by NASA scientists filling time capsules with messages packed in the interior of a space rocket floating around out there, in case the earth blew up and anyone became curious with whomever used to live on our planet.

This moving documentary about the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews starts with a suitcase of a Hana, a child exterminated in Auschwitz, sent to the director of the Tokyo Holocaust museum. She becomes intrigued, takes snapshots, sends images to students, and engages them in working on a research project with her. Then, the movie deploys narratives of her brother, George, a survivor; fictional filming of her life as it was prior to the rise of the Nazis and then at every step through deportation two camps including Auschwitz; the motions the researcher went through as she stalked the spirit of the suitcase’s deceased owner, and the involvement of the youth helping their teacher on the research project. The movie holds interest on many levels, including the story of the holocaust itself along many themes such as relations of family members and how children were treated; the story of engaged collaborative research; and how the passion of an educator can infuse students of many ages.

By the time the brother survivor, George, flies in from Toronto to meet the woman who has the suitcase and to view the last remaining objects of his long-lost sister, I have forgotten my original purpose in viewing the film. Tears streaming down my face, I hear George’s daughter quip, “hey, this looks like Times Square,” as they looked out the window of a taxi moving through heavy urban scenery, and listen to him answer, “doesn’t look anything like Times Square;” and follow the voice-over, “our arrival in Tokyo was surreal; we felt like we were arriving on another planet.” I remembered the venue for which I was reviewing the film, and focused on how each student stood to greet him, bowing, presenting flowers, and how moved he was, seeing what he thought was the actual suitcase. Then the post-script of the original suitcase was burnt in 1984 as the neo-Nazis had torched the museum warehouse led the survivors to interpret, Hana’s spirit was so strong that the story was definitely “supposed” to be told. This ending causes a flashback of mystical moments throughout the film, where the researcher relates feeling Hana’s spirit, and getting goose bumps, as she follows the dead child’s trail deciding she has to visit the scenes of the crimes and not just do research by email.