



Setting Holocaust Record Straight: Westport Author Says Jews Fought Back; Movie to be Made

By Lisa Chamoff
Staff Writer

Reprinted from The Norwalk Advocate
June 20, 2007

WESTPORT - Nechama Tec has spent countless hours researching and writing the stories of Jewish people, including herself, a Holocaust survivor.

But people still have misconceptions about one of the darkest times in recent history, said Tec, a native of Poland who now lives in Westport and is a longtime sociology professor at the University of Connecticut at Stamford.

"There are many legends during times of unrest during the Holocaust," Tec said. "One of the legends is the Jews went willingly to their deaths. I think the only way you can do anything about it is pay attention to the facts."

A wider audience can soon see one of the stories she brought to light. Tec's book, "Defiance: The Bielski Partisans," is being made into a movie by Edward Zwick, a director and producer of films such as "Blood Diamond," "The Last Samurai" and "Glory."

Production on the movie is to begin in September. Actor Daniel Craig, the most recent James Bond, is set to play the lead. "Defiance" is the story of three brothers who form a group that brings Jews from ghettos and from hiding into the thick, jungle-like Nalibocka Forest in Belorussia.

Craig will play their leader, Tuvia Bielski, an uneducated but charismatic man who eventually assembled a group of more than 1,200 Jews.

"He had ideas about how to fight and how to organize," Tec said. "He told them that one of the main things would be to save as many Jews as they can."

Tec's other award-winning books include her own story of survival, "Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood," published in 1982, in which she recounts how she hid with Christians in Poland during the war and pretended to be Catholic.

Her book "Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust," was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 2004. It explores how men and women had different experiences during the Holocaust.

That book was prompted by the research Tec did for "Defiance," which included a trip to interview Bielski in 1987, just two weeks before he died at the age of 81.

"Defiance" was optioned by Zwick eight years ago, but the option expired, which Tec said has happened before with a few of her books.

"You sell an option, and then it runs out and that's it," she said.

But about six weeks ago, Zwick's production company approached her about trying again. By this time, Zwick had completed the script, which Tec was reading during a recent phone interview. She said the screenplay is "beautifully written."

The movie has become a family project. Tec's son, Roland Tec, who has worked in the film industry for 15 years, is a co-producer. Though she was worried about the story being "trivialized" and its historical aspects distorted, Tec said she trusts Zwick.

"He's extremely sensitive to historical nuances," she said.

Tec said she was candid about the group's faults in her book. Not everyone was as inclusive as Tuvia Bielski, and people didn't want him to take in the elderly or the poor. But compared with other groups that sought refuge in the forest, only a small amount of Bielski's group perished.

"I write about everything - the good things that they did, the bad things that they did," Tec said.

"Defiance" will shoot in Lithuania for three months.

"I'm just really excited about someone like Ed Zwick bringing their eye to this material," Roland Tec said. "I think it's really important to get this story out - Jewish rescue of Jews, which is very unusual."