

SYNOPSIS

Logline:

OLGA NENYA is a foster mother to SIXTEEN BLACK ORPHANS in Ukraine - where 99.9% of the population is white and where race DOES matter.

Short:

Olga NENYA, from a small Ukrainian town, is raising SIXTEEN BLACK ORPHANS in a country of Slavic blue-eyed blonds. The reality of growing up as a bi-racial child in Eastern Europe, a rare and truly visible minority, is not for the faint of heart. While Olga is on a crusade to save her children from the unjust world, she is also determined to shape their future according to her own, sometimes limited vision.

Long:

Olga NENYA has 27 children. Four of them, now adults, are her biological children; the other 23 are adopted or foster children. Of those 23, 16 are biracial. She calls them "my chocolates," and is raising them to be patriotic Ukrainians. Some residents of Sumy, Ukraine, consider Olga a saint, but many believe she is simply crazy. An inheritance from the Soviet era, a stigma persists here against interracial relationships, and against children born as the result of romantic encounters between Ukrainian girls and exchange students from Africa. For more than a decade, Olga has been picking up the black babies left in Ukrainian orphanages and raising them together so that they may support and protect one another.

The filmmakers interview Neo-Nazis in Ukraine reveals the real dangers for a dark-skinned individual in the street. These white supremacist youth joke about their evening raids and how police seem to let them do it. Prosecutors are not particularly determined to give strict sentences to racially motivated crimes, and young thugs can get away with probation for beating someone nearly to death.

Olga sends her foster children to stay with host families in France and Italy in the summers and over Christmas, where they are cared for by charitable families who have committed to helping disadvantaged Ukrainian youth since the Chernobyl disaster. Olga's kids now speak different languages, and the older girls chat in fluent Italian with each other even while cooking a vat of borscht. But Olga doesn't believe in international adoption and has refused to sign adoption papers from host families that wanted to adopt her kids.

"At least when the kids grow up, they'll have a mother to blame for all the failures that will happen in their lives," she says.

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES



Julia Ivanova – Director / Writer / Camera / Editor

Julia Ivanova, a Canadian documentary film director and editor, grew up in Moscow and was trained at the Russian Film Institute (VGIK). After immigrating to Canada in 1995, Julia together with her brother Boris Ivanov self-produced their first documentary "From Russia, For Love" which has been televised in 26 countries. In the decade that followed Julia felt a deep commitment to making films that break individual and societal perceptions. She directed a number of intimate films on the topics of minorities, orphanhood and search for love. These films have been shown on PBS, Discovery, and various TV channels in Canada, Asia and Europe. Other titles include "Fatherhood Dreams" (2007) - a film about gay fathers and their children; "10 Days=Wife: Love Translated" (2010) - a journey into the world of Dating Tours to Eastern Europe. Her new film "High Five: A Suburban Adoption Saga" hits the film festival circuit in 2013. Julia is actively involved with the work of the Documentary Organization of Canada, and she is a Board Member of Hot Docs Film Festival.



Boris Ivanov - Producer

Boris Ivanov is Interfilm's hands-on producer in charge of development and production. His producing credits include feature documentaries that screened in competition at Sundance, Chicago, Los Angeles Film Festival's including titles Family Portrait in Black and White, 10 Days=Wife: Love Translated as well as a number of TV hours broadcast on Discovery Fit & Health, PBS and sold worldwide. Other credits include theatrical recreations for History channel's Beyond Top Secret, which has earned two News and Documentary Emmy nominations; as well as theatrical recreations director and producer for the Investigation Discovery's series Deranged, three episodes of WeTV's Secret Lives of Women, a special on Jaycee Duggard: Kidnapped for 18 years for TLC and two specials for TLC: Natalie Holloway-Lost in Paradise and TV Murders.

FOR IMAGES:

For hi-res images, please go to the FAMILY PORTRAIT IN BLACK AND WHITE website:

<http://www.familyportraitthefilm.com/press>

CAPTIONS:

Press1.jpg: Olga NENYA with her foster son Gabriel. Sumy, Ukraine, 2008. A film still from the documentary "Family Portrait in Black and White". copyright Family Portrait Productions.

Press2.jpg: Olga NENYA and her foster children in front of their house. Sumy, Ukraine, 2008. A film still from the documentary "Family Portrait in Black and White". copyright Family Portrait Productions.

Press3.jpg: Masha, Karina, Snezhana with Life, the dog, in front of their house. Sumy, Ukraine, 2008. A film still from the documentary "Family Portrait in Black and White". copyright Family Portrait Productions.

Press4.jpg: Maxim on the first day of a school with his classmates. Sumy, Ukraine, 2008. A film still from the documentary "Family Portrait in Black and White". copyright Family Portrait Productions.

Also see additional photos and filmmaker photos available on the website.

TECHNICAL INFO

Shooting Format: HD

Cameras used: Sony EX3, Panasonic HVX200

Screening Formats Available: HD Cam 23.98 Stereo, DCP 24fps 5.1 Surround, Blu Ray 5.1 Surround, DigiBeta NTSC Stereo, Digibeta PAL Stereo, HDCAM PAL Stereo, Beta SP PAL Stereo, DVD Stereo, Digital File H264 Stereo

Aspect Ratio: 1.85

Duration: 85minutes

Sound: Depending on screening format. See above

AWARDS:

32nd GENIE AWARDS (Canada) (aka Canadian Oscars)

“NOMINEE: Best Feature Documentary”

18th HOT DOCS FILM FESTIVAL (Canada)

“Grand Prize: Best Canadian Film Award”

56TH VALLADOLID INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Spain)

“Cultural Diversity Award” and “Time of History Third Prize”

6TH MIRADASDOC –DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL

GUIA DE ISADORA (Spain)

“Audience Award”

6th ADDIS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)

“Jury Prize: Best Documentary”

39th NORTHWEST FILMMAKERS FILM FESTIVAL (USA)

Portland (Oregon)

“Audience Award”

PRESS QUOTES WITH LINKS

"It's a fascinating story, fascinatingly told." -Peter Rainer, Christian Science Monitor
<http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2012/0713/Family-Portrait-in-Black-and-White-movie-review>

"Riveting viewing and recommended." -Tambay Obenson, Indiewire's Shadow and Act
<http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/new-in-usa-theaters-the-obama-effect-family-portrait-in-black-white-ballplayer-pelotero>

"Gets high marks for honesty." - Neil Genzlinger, New York Times
 New York Times, July 13, 2012. Positive review by Neil Genzlinger with photo.
<http://movies.nytimes.com/2012/07/13/movies/family-portrait-in-black-and-white.html>

"Family Portrait in Black and White has a quiet, deceptive simplicity that recalls the films of the Maysles brothers." -Chuck Bowen, Slant also "Beautiful, often challenging..."
<http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/family-portrait-in-black-and-white/6391>

"Ivanova, who is credited as writer, director, cinematographer, and editor, somehow manages the tricky feat of nonetheless establishing—and maintaining—a light, bouncy atmosphere throughout." also "...to know that a film like Family Portrait in Black and White will be playing in a Times Square multiplex alongside franchise blockbusters in the dead heat of summer should give us all a tiny breath of hope." -Michael Tully, Filmmaker Magazine
<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/news/2012/07/family-portrait-in-black-and-white-a-hammer-to-nail-review/>

"...the film is remarkable, as fearless and complex and difficult as the family it represents." -Cynthia Fuchs, Pop Matters, 9 stars out of 10
<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/review/160923-family-portrait-in-black-and-white-mixed-race-children-in-ukraine/>

"A multiple-award-winning international festival favorite, Family Portrait in Black and White is a compelling look at racism, value systems, and just what family means in today's ever-changing society."
 - Mark Rifkin, This Week in New York
<http://twi-ny.com/blog/2012/07/13/family-portrait-in-black-and-white/>

"A powerful and complex documentary..." also "An absorbing film, shot over a lengthy period of time, which refuses to tell you what to think." -NY Magazine

"Riveting viewing." -Ernest Hardy, Village Voice
<http://www.villagevoice.com/2012-07-11/film/family-portrait-in-black-and-white/>

"Julia Ivanova beautifully highlights Olga NENYA's bold and courageous journey as she copes with the difficulties of parenting while navigating the challenges of foster care, adoption, and racism. The film is riveting, truthful, and profound." – Rosie O'Donnell

"Humanity of this picture's subjects is what makes it a compelling experience."

TV GUIDE (3 1/2 of 4)

<http://movies.tvguide.com/family-portrait-in-black-and-white/review/376811>

"The film is a feat of unforced and watchful insight."

CHICAGO TRIBUNE (3 1/2 out of 4)

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-mov-0914-specialty-screening-20120914,0,306911.column>

MORE REVIEWS:

Huffington Post, July 12, 2012. E. Nina Rothe's interview with Julia.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mobileweb/e-nina-rothe/family-portrait-in-black- b_1666132.html

About.com, July 2012. Positively included in July documentary overview by Jennifer Merin.

<http://documentaries.about.com/od/events/a/Documentaries-Opening-In-July-2012.htm>

Indiewire.com, July 12, 2012. B- review by Andrew Schenker with trailer.

<http://www.indiewire.com/article/out-this-week-12-reviews-of-new-indie-releases>

ArtInfo.com, July 11. 2012. Positive review by David D'Arcy.

<http://blogs.artinfo.com/outtakes/2012/07/11/attack-him-%E2%80%93-he%E2%80%99s-ukrainian%E2%80%A6and-black/#more-2803>

Golos-Ameriki, July 11, 2012. Oleg Sulkin's interview with Julia with photo. (in Russian)

<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/ukraine-film-white-black-big-family/1403411.html>

News Blaze, July 15, 2012. Review by Prairie Miller.

<http://newsblaze.com/story/20120715065625mill.nb/topstory.html>

FILM FESTIVAL SCREENINGS:**SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****IDFA - INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FILM****FESTIVAL AMSTERDAM (Netherlands)****LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****MUMBAI FILM FESTIVAL (INDIA)****HAIFA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (ISRAEL)****HAMPTONS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****GLASGOW INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (UK)****THESSALONIKI FILM FESTIVAL (GREECE)****MESSAGE TO MAN DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL (RUSSIA)****BERGEN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (NORWAY)****VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (CANADA)****ASTRA FILM FESTIVAL (ROMANIA)****SARASOTA FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****BERMUDA FILM FESTIVAL (BERMUDA)****EBS INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL (SOUTH KOREA)****KAOHSIUNG FILM FESTIVAL (TAIWAN)****WATCHDOCS HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL (POLAND)****MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL BLACK FILM FESTIVAL (CANADA)****NEW HAMPSHIRE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****THIS HUMAN WORLD FILM FESTIVAL (AUSTRIA)****HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FILM FESTIVAL (UK)****ONE WORLD HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL (CZECH REPUBLIC****& ROMANIA & KOSOVO)****CAPE WINELANDS FILM FESTIVAL (SOUTH AFRICA)****AFRICA WORLD DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL
(CAMEROON, NIGERIA, USA, BARBADOS, UK)****SEATTLE FILM FESTIVAL (USA)****MILLENIUM DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL (BELGIUM)**

MIXED ROOTS FILM FESTIVAL (LA – USA)
NEW ZEALAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
BELDOCS (SERBIA)
AVAILABLE LIGHT FILM FESTIVAL (CANADA)
CINEMIGRANTE (MEXICO)
FILM FESTIVAL FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS (KOREA)
HUMANDOC FILM FESTIVAL (POLAND)
PARNU FILM FESTIVAL (ESTONIA)
VERZIO HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL (HUNGARY)
VUKOVAR FILM FESTIVAL (CROATIA)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

WHY IS OLGA A FIGHTER?

Olga is sacrificing her life to raise her children. Olga does not even have a social worker who would take over for even one hour per week, no psychologist to deal with the issues many of her children have and no tutor to help them with homework. Ukrainian authorities provide Olga with a tiny fraction of what the government gives to orphanages per child. In fact, because the house was bought for Olga by a British charity, local authorities refuse to spend a penny on fixing the heating system, building an in-house toilet or bringing hot water into the house. Instead they send Child Welfare Inspectors. The unhelpful inspectors walk through the house and demand better conditions to be provided to the foster children by Olga. It's an Orwellian picture - an absurd injustice where bureaucrats don't help the family and blame Olga for all shortcomings. The local authorities threaten to "downsize" her family and to send half of the children who have been with her for 10-14 years to orphanages. No one will consult with the children because orphans have no say in any decision that permanently affects their lives. The chilling consequences of a pending separation from Olga and each other becomes clear when Olga travels to visit her troubled foster child Andrey, who was placed at a boarding school for children with special needs.

SERGEY, 14, joined the family just a few years ago, and he can easily compare Olga to his previous foster mother. His testimonial raises an alarming question about foster care in Ukraine. In its desire to eliminate orphanages, the government allows pretty much anyone to provide foster care, including people with greed in their heart instead of compassion.

DO WESTERNERS HELP OLGA AND HER FOSTER CHILDREN?

The modern world is interconnected. A British Charity bought the house for the family, and the children spend summers with host families in France and Italy year after year. Many European families have chosen to help Ukrainian disadvantaged kids since the time of the Chernobyl disaster by inviting them to stay during their summers and Christmas. Many of Olga's kids can speak different languages; the older girls often chat in fluent Italian with each other even while cooking a vat of borscht.

WHY IS ADOPTION NOT AN OPTION?

Many of these host families have wanted to adopt Olga's foster children but face Olga's resentment. Though Olga has arranged the summer stays for her kids in Europe, she doesn't believe in international adoption and has refused to sign the adoption consent papers. Like many Ukrainians, she believes in patriotic feelings and love to the Motherland even when the love is unrequited. Also, she feels the children already have

a family – her family.

During the filming, Anya, the oldest girl in the family, was finally adopted by her host family in Italy where she had been spending her summers for the last 13 years. Neither Olga, nor the Ukrainian authorities had a say in this adoption any more because Anya is 18 and legally an adult.

BLACK CHILDREN IN UKRAINE – ARE THEY ADOPTED FROM AFRICA?

All kids were born and raised in Ukraine. Their birth-mothers are unwed Ukrainian girls while their fathers, in most cases, are students from Africa who came to Ukraine to study at universities and medical schools. Despite the fact that these kids see themselves as 100% Ukrainian and they don't know any other culture, they are seen as "different" by the world around them. As one neighbor points out, "mixing blood types is deadly, and here we have children that are born that way!" Does such attitude affect the way Olga Nemytska's foster children feel and behave? It sure does, but not in the way one would expect. No one carries race-related complexes in this household. It was Olga's idea – to raise many mixed-race children together so that they could support and protect each another.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN IN THE FILM?

The lessons the kids learn very early in life are: "stick together and fight" and "life is not fair." Is Olga always fair to them? By no means! Olga is not Mother Teresa; she bears much closer resemblance to a wartime commander or a platoon leader. Some kids have learned to manipulate her, some obey, and only one constantly battles with her.

KIRIL, a 16-year-old boy nicknamed "Mr. President" for his intelligence, work ethic, and effortless aristocracy, is the only one who dares to openly argue with Olga. He has a clear vision of the future he wants for himself but when it doesn't coincide with Olga's vision, the clash has everlasting consequences not only for him but also for the whole family.

ROMAN, 13, never argues but stubbornly breaks the rules if anything stands in the way of his true passion – soccer. Being in charge of the numerous goats in the household, he has little time left and little support in achieving his dream, which is to become a professional soccer player. When his biological father appears in the picture, it makes his life even more complicated.

SASHKA, 14, one of Olga's favorites, is a charming candidate for a school dropout and the leader of local rebels. Sashka loves and adores his foster mom – Olga. He is bitter that local authorities have little understanding of the scale of Olga's altruism and love for her foster children. His story starts with him being a proud Ukrainian, but two years later he is determined to leave the country because of the rampant racism in Ukraine.

SYLVIA, 13, is a beautiful, shy, obedient girl, who plays violin and whose parents were

both students from Egypt. Sylvia is lucky to have at least some information about her parents – most of Olga's children were left at the orphanages at birth and don't even know the first name of their birth mother or father.

ANYA, 18, is a quiet older girl who is in charge of cooking for the whole family everyday. Anya, unlike all the other kids in the family, is finally being adopted by the Italian family with whom she has been spending summers and Christmas since she was seven years old. Anya believes she has two mothers – Olga and Barbara, her Italian host. Olga finds it difficult to cope with Anya's adoption because, for Olga, it simply feels as if Anya has betrayed her.

ANDREY, 11, is a quick-tempered boy who authorities have sent to a boarding school for children with special needs. His story is the most tragic – by the end of the film he is visibly damaged by the torture he suffered at the Psychiatric Hospital where he was sent for treatment.

MAXIM, 9, is a sweet boy who just can't learn to read. In Ukraine, authorities do not recognize dyslexia as a genuine condition so there is a threat that Maxim might end up in the same boarding school for children with special needs as his foster brother Andrey. Maxim has a loving and devoted host family in Italy, and his love to "papa Sandro" and "grandpa Franco" is obvious. For Sandro and Franco this little boy from Ukraine is their son and grandson, the centre of their lives. However the government will not allow the adoption of a Ukrainian orphan by Sandro, a single man.

CREDITS

Director / Writer / Cinematography / Editor

JULIA IVANOVA

Producer

BORIS IVANOV

Associate Producer

MIKE JACKSON

Camera

STANISLAV SHAKHOV

Original Music

BORIS SICHON

Vocals

RIVKA SICHON

BORIS SICHON

Additional Songs

“Mama”

Written and Performed by BASTA

Courtesy of GazGolder-Record

“Mama for baby Mammoth”

Written by Dina Nepomniashaya

Courtesy of Igor Nepomniashiy

Ukrainian Skinhead Footage
Courtesy of DANIEL REYNOLDS

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The Province of British Columbia: Film Incentive B.C.

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