



A father's escape from Nazi Germany. A son's journey to tell the story.

Stones from the Soil

The Story of the Gross Breesen Farm

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MONTROSE making moving pictures

Stones from the Soil / Long Synopsis

Stones from the Soil tells the story of a unique school in 1930s Germany where a small group of Jewish teenagers were trained to become the vanguard of a new society. One of those teenagers was the filmmaker's father, Rudolph Caplan. The school, situated on a farm, was called Gross Breesen (pronounced bray' sen), and it would eventually save the lives of Rudi and 150 other students. *Stones from the Soil* begins sixty-six years later, when Rudi's son returned to find the farm.

During their four to five years at Gross Breesen, the isolated teenagers were protected by both the administrators and their families from the growing anti-Semitism in the country. There was no question they would have to leave Germany at some point; nonetheless, their lives were filled with tilling fields and milking cows during the day, and listening to classical quartets at night. Curt Bondy, a renowned psychologist and professor, was selected to run Gross Breesen, which was the name of both the town and the name the farm came to have.

Their seclusion was shattered in November of 1938, the day after Kristallnacht (Crystal Night), when an SS squadron came to Gross Breesen to terrorize and destroy. After vandalizing the buildings, the squadron took Doctor Bondy and all boys over 18 to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. However the camps were not yet extermination factories, and after a month the group was released, signing a promissory note to leave Germany as quickly as possible. Everyone at Gross Breesen left Germany by August of 1939, a month before Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and immigration was slowed down to a trickle.

The bond forged between the "Gross Breeseners" is so strong, that they have stayed in touch for sixty-five years via letters that circle the globe. The first Gross Breesen reunion took place in Israel in the late 1980s, and since then, reunions have been held on almost a yearly basis.

The film blends traditional interviews with inventive visuals, historical photos with dream-like video, and social commentary with personal discovery. *Stones from the Soil* is a tribute to a father, a reflection on memory, and a preservation of a formerly untold story from the Nazi era.



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Stones from the Soil / Short Synopsis

Stones from the Soil is a personal documentary about a unique school in 1930s Germany, in which a small group of Jewish teenagers was trained to become the vanguard of a new society. One of those teenagers was the filmmaker's father. The school would eventually save his life and the lives of 150 other students.



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Stones from the Soil / Press & PR

Stones from the Soil aired from 2005-2007 on 150 PBS stations throughout the U.S, with primetime coverage in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Florida, and more.

In August of 2005 the film aired on WTTW—Channel 11 in Chicago, preceded by interviews of Michael Caplan on WBEZ, the Chicago National Public Radio station, and on WTTW's nightly news show, Chicago Tonight. It has been viewed by more than 500,000 people nationwide.

In October 2005, Michael Caplan appeared at the Apple Store in Chicago in October as part of the *Inside the Edit Room* series. This is a live event series for professional and aspiring filmmakers looking to learn tips, tricks, and techniques on today's popular creative applications from working professionals. Caplan discussed the extensive use of Final Cut Pro's technical capabilities while editing *Stones from the Soil*.



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Stones from the Soil / Credits

Director, Writer, Producer

Michael Caplan

Co-Producer, Editor, Visual Design

Rebecca Rose

Gross-Breeseners

Werner T. Angress
Herbert R. Cohn
Ernst Cramer
Carola R. Domar
Kenneth Herman
Hans George Hirsch
Hans Krieger
Eva Loew
George Landecker
Ann Strauss

In Memoriam:

Rudolph M. Caplan
Ruth Hadra
Isidor J. Kirshrot
Wolf S. Stein

Second generation

Jeffrey Cohn
Marga Hirsch
Deborah Hirsch Mayer
Jeff Krieger
Margaret Loew

Children in pool

Maximillian S. Caplan
Benjamin Melickian

Directors of Photography

New York—1998: John Kelleran
New York—2000: Chris Peppey
Europe—2002: Caroline Brandes
Farm footage: Rebecca Rose
Home movies: David G. Caplan
Home video: Michael P. Caplan

Gross-Breesen Photographs

Rudolph M. Caplan, George Landecker, Eva Loew

Music composed and performed by

Leslie Spencer

MASS Ensemble

Corky Siegel

Colorist

Tim Stipan, Sol FX Design

Title Design

Christopher Gotschall, Cutters

Audio Mix

Geraldo DeOliveira, Cathedral Inc.

Audio Consultant

Larry Kapson

Translator

Magdalena Klibes

Marketing Assistant

Deborah Pergament

Assistant to the Producer

Marie Frick

Christina McKay

Historical Research

Werner T. Angress

Herbert Cohn

Deborah Pergament

Special Thanks

Suzanne Evita Caplan—

Your support has never wavered.

Deborah Pergament

Dr. Eugene and Mrs. Geri Pergament

Jonathan Hoffman

Nikola Vlahovich

Adam Triantaflos

Chris Peppey

Larry Kapson

Russell Porter

Bruce Sheridan

The Michael Rabiger Documentary Center

Jeff Spitz

Mark Dial
Tom Weinberg
Steven Diller
David Lissner
The Film/Video Department, Columbia College Chicago

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Director Bio / Michael Caplan



Michael Caplan is an independent film director and producer. Currently he is producing and directing a documentary entitled *Algren*, about the life and career of Nelson Algren, the National Book Award winning author of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and *A Walk on the Wild Side*. His most recently completed films are *A Magical Vision*, which spotlights Eugene Burger, a far-sighted philosopher and magician who is considered one of the great teachers of the magical arts, and *Stones from the Soil*, a personal documentary that aired on national PBS throughout 2005.

Caplan has produced three critically acclaimed feature films, including *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, heralded by The New York Times as "praiseworthy, intense, frenetic, frank, and touching... preserving not just a performance but the spirit of a time"; *Peoria Babylon* starring Ann Cusack and David Drake, which the Chicago Tribune called "...wonderfully funny...charming all the way around"; and *The Windy City*, a favorite at the 1992 Black Harvest Film Festival. He has also directed and written several dramatic shorts, which have been screened on PBS in Chicago and film festivals nationwide.

Caplan lives in Chicago where he received his Master of Fine Arts in film from Northwestern University. He is a full-time professor and Associate Chair at Columbia College Chicago.



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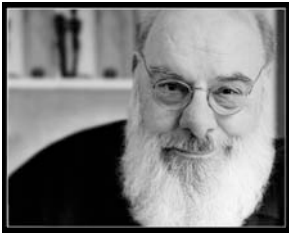
Michael Caplan / Filmography

Algren (In-production)—Director/Writer/Producer



Algren is a feature documentary that will recast Nelson Algren, National Book Award-winning author of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and *A Walk on the Wild Side* (among others), as the under-celebrated voice for America's voiceless, and explore his life as an artist whose compassion for humanity—and the underdogs whom he regarded as the "true" America—is a message of universal relevance and timelessness.

A Magical Vision (2008)—Director/Writer/Producer



A Magical Vision is a feature documentary spotlighting Eugene Burger, a far-sighted philosopher and magician considered one of the great teachers of the magical arts. Eugene and his peers have fostered a movement reviving the shamanistic roots of magic performance. Michael traveled across the country to interview Eugene, Max Maven, Jeff McBride, Luna Shemada, Larry Hass, and other magicians and thinkers who have opened the doors to this astounding world. *A Magical Vision* shines a light on this magnificent vista. (57 minutes).

Screenings

Magic Chicago – October 2008

Gene Siskel Film Center – September 2008

Muhlenberg College/Theory & Art of Magic Conference – March 2009

Festivals

Global Cinema Festival, Indore Madhya Pradesh, India, October 2009

Culture Unplugged/Spirit Enlightened Online Film Festival, January – May 2010

Stones from the Soil (2004)—Director/Writer/Producer

Stones from the Soil is a personal documentary about a unique school in 1930's Germany, in which a small group of Jewish teenagers were trained to become the vanguard of a new society. One of those



teenagers was the filmmaker's father, Rudolph Caplan. The school was called Gross Breesen and would eventually save Rudi's life and the lives of the 150 other students. The film blends traditional interviews with inventive visuals, historical photos with dream-like video, and social commentary with personal discovery. Ultimately, it is a tribute to a father, a reflection on memory and an important preservation of a formerly untold story of Jewish history from the Nazi era.

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Reviews

Renowned photographer Shimon Attie, called *Stones from the Soil*, “a very moving and emotional piece” and Static Multimedia said it is “an intimate, tender, and often disturbing look at [Caplan’s] heritage... poignant and entertaining.” (57 minutes)

Television

National PBS Broadcast—May 2005. Broadcast on over 125 affiliates, including WNET in New York, WGBH in Boston, and WTTW in Chicago.

Screenings

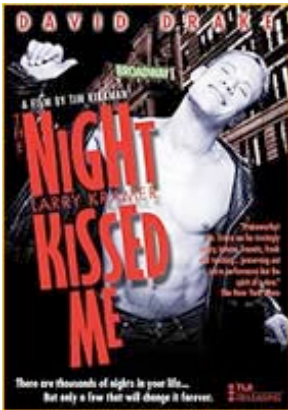
DePaul University – 2007

College of DuPage – 2005

Independent Feature Project—Midwest Film Conference—October 2003

American Anthropological Association conference—November 2003

The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me (2000)—Producer



This film interpretation of the one-man show performed and written by David Drake has played in over 75 cities in The United States and Canada. Featured in art-house theatres and over 50 film festivals throughout the world, this semi-autobiographical performance piece contains several poignant stories about growing up gay in the 1980s. From his opening monologue describing the impact playwright Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* had on him, to his riff on “Why I Go to the Gym,” Drake gives a unique, multi-character performance. Other segments include a vigil for friends and lovers he lost to AIDS, and his imaginative, idealized future where the plague is cured, and Matt and Ben remake *The Way We Were*.

Reviews

The New York Times called it “Praiseworthy...preserving not just a performance, but the spirit of a time,” while the *Toronto Sun* said it was “Funny, moving and provocative...” *The Village Voice* said, “Drake sustains an impossible balance between mordant wit and articulate bewilderment.” It showed in over 60 cities internationally, in festivals and art houses. (90 minutes)

Honors

Facets Video—*Must See/Must Own: Gay and Lesbian Cinema*

Television

Here! TV—*The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* was one of three movies chosen to run during the premiere week of this nationally broadcast Pay-per-View network in 2003.

Festivals (selected representation)

Houston Gay & Lesbian Film Festival—February 2001

Michigan Lesbian & Gay Film Festival—January 2001

Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival—October 2000

North Carolina Gay and Lesbian Film Festival—August 2000

Outfest—Los Angeles Lesbian and Gay Film Festival—July 2000

Provincetown International Film Festival—June 2000
New York Lesbian And Gay Film Festival—June 2000
Maryland Film Festival—May 2000
London Lesbian And Gay Film Festival—April 2000

Peoria Babylon (1996)—Producer



Jon Ashe (David Drake, “Philadelphia”, “Longtime Companion”), needs more from life in Peoria ... the 20 gay men who live in the small town are tacky, boring, and unimaginative. Candy Dineen (Ann Cusack, “A League of Their Own”) is well-bred, blonde, and broke. Together they own two halves of a failing gallery. Their lives are depressed and glum until a hunky art stud reveals his talent for art forgery and publicity stunts. As the three conspire, they imagine a most successful venture: an Art Massacre that will destroy some of the world's most famous paintings... with a twist. The unbelievable art con gains fame, wealth, success, and all the problems that follow. In the end, what remains are the pleas of a lesbian-porn drag queen turned congresswoman, her angry lover’s Godfather, his disgruntled wife, and a snooty gallery director.

Reviews

The *Chicago Tribune* gave it three stars and called it “wonderfully funny...charming all the way around,” while the *Chicago Sun-Times* said it was “wacky and witty.”

Festivals

Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival—June 1998
Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival—November 1997
Mardi Gras Film Festival, Sydney, Australia—February 1997
Texas Film Festival—February 1997

The Windy City (1992)—Producer



The Windy City is comic look at the reunion of four African-American friends the night before their 10th High School Reunion, starring Anthony Griffith (“Tales from the Hood”) and James Black (“The Don King Story”). (90 minutes)

Festivals

Black Harvest Film Festival—October 1995