

**THE DOCUMENTARIES
OF
JOE SALTZMAN
(1967-1974)**



A MESSAGE FROM NORMAN CORWIN

I believe the documentary films of Joe Saltzman rank among the finest in the world. If I am wrong, I have wasted 15 years as chairman of the Documentary Awards Committee of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In that span I have seen about 2,000 documentaries of all lengths, and based on that experience I make the flat statement that there are no other filmmakers alive who more consistently, effectively – and often daringly – deal with basic aspects of social concern.

I helped myself to a crash course in six Saltzman films. I found them properly uneven in style and texture, but uniform in their insight, relevance, penetration, provocativeness, and underlying compassion. Each of them zeroes in, with all the firepower of which film is capable, on matters that matter importantly. All are energized by a crusading sense of justice. In a time as callous, indifferent and cynical as the present, it is heartening to find an artist who cares about the problems and anxieties of blacks, of Native Americans, of adolescents, of teachers, of rape victims, of cancer patients.

Notwithstanding the many fine films, which have been made during and since the ascendancy of the civil rights movement, Saltzman's *Black on Black* gets inside the minds and hearts of its subjects as no other documentary has quite done. It demonstrates beyond peradventure of doubt, that nobody can speak as revealingly and cogently about how it is to be black in an essentially white world, than blacks themselves. It is a film that achieves high effect at ground level.

The Unhappy Hunting Ground is a disturbing wide-angle view of the American Indian on and off the reservation – the tragedy of a people who are perhaps the only substantial element in the great ethnic melting pot, which has not profited from assimilation. As in his film on blacks, Saltzman extracts essences seldom found in the literature of documentary film.

The Junior High School resembles in approach and spirit some of the work of another master documentarian, Frederick Wiseman, especially Wiseman's *High School*; but this, like every Saltzman film, is suffused with a kind of reined compassion rarely found in canvases of this scope. Saltzman's work, as shown again in this film, is never a mere inventory, but a search for truth, which the audience is invited to join.

Rape benefits from the same striking balancing of filmic skills, and once again testifies to Saltzman's genius for subjective documentation. The reverberations of rape, the during-and-after psychological detail, the long-lasting consequences, are powerfully projected. *Rape*, like the other films in this group, belongs in the curriculum of all studies sand agencies addressed to the particular arenas.

Both as a personal portrait and as a window on the problems of aging recipients of public welfare, *The Very Personal Death of Elizabeth Schell Holt-Hartford* is a superb specimen of documentary art. It is triply illuminated – by the glow of the subject's personality, and the sympathetic stance and high craftsmanship of the production. The adjectives of the title – “very personal death” – are justified by the dignity and compassion of the life-and-death account.

The physical and psychological trauma of breast cancer, one of the most universally dreaded forms of the scourge, is explored in *Why Me?* a remarkably dimensional view of the experiences of several women who underwent mastectomies. It is no easy thing to strike exactly the right tone in such a film – neither too clinical nor condescending to the layman, not sentimental, nor overloaded with exposition, nor oversimplified. *Why Me?* is at once informative, instructive, and deeply human – a picture that should be seen by women periodically, as a kind of routine checkup. It has won national recognition in the form of multiple awards, and no wonder. But then this is to be increasingly expected of Saltzman productions.

Norman Corwin, a member of the Radio Hall of Fame, served as writer-director-producer for CBS with such memorable series as 26 by Corwin and Columbia Presents Corwin, and wrote and hosted the PBC-TV series, Academy Leaders. He is considered one of the finest broadcast writers to ever work in the medium, an inspiration to such diverse artists as Norman Lear, Charles Kuralt and Studs Terkel.

The following documentaries are now available on DVD:



Black on Black, a 90-minute documentary told without a narrator depicting how it feels to be black and live in South-Central Los Angeles. First broadcast in July, 1968, CBS in Los Angeles. Reprint: September, 1968.

Awards: Winner of six major awards including the Edward R. Murrow Award for “distinguished television reporting and best documentary”; the Greater Los Angeles Press Club's Best Documentary; Radio-Television News Directors' Association's Golden Mike, Western Region best documentary; Associated Press Certificate of Excellence; NAACP Image Award, and National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Regional Emmy.

One critic wrote: “The best documentary ever made on what it feels like to be black and live in the urban ghetto.” The documentary is considered one of the seminal television documentaries on African-Americans.



The Unhappy Hunting Ground, a 90-minute documentary (also available in a special 60-minute version) on the Native American in Los Angeles. It is a very personal story told by Native Americans themselves. Without a narrator, the program is told by the voices and faces of Indians who are struggling against the slow erosion of identity, pride and dignity. First broadcast on February, 1971, on CBS in Los Angeles. Special one-hour version, December 1972.

Winner of the Radio-Television News Association Golden Mike, best documentary of the year.

One critic wrote: "An agonizing study of the plight of the contemporary American Indian is searching, sad and maddening – maddening because of what this program shows man can do to man."

The Hollywood Reporter: "Saltzman captured the complete disorientation of the Indian, his hesitancy to cope with even the Los Angeles bus system and his painful decision to blend into the white culture... a compelling program."

Variety: "Saltzman sought out L.A. haunts of unhappy Indians, examined their predicament and came up with a documentary of extraordinary quality. It is a stunning achievement."

Buffy Sainte-Marie, Native American composer-singer-activist: "The most moving document of what the Indian in the city goes through as I have ever seen."



The Junior High School, a two-hour documentary on the junior high school experience. A full year in production. First broadcast in 1971. "Heaven, Hell or Purgatory, Part I," October 17, 1971. "From A to Zoo, Part II, October 24," 1971. Reprint: Two-hour special, January, 1973. Reprint: Four-part program on consecutive Sundays, November, 1973.

Awards: National Television Broadcast Executives' documentary of the year, Excellence in Broadcast Journalism; Edward R. Murrow Award for Distinguished Achievement in Broadcast Journalism and Television Documentary Reporting; John Swett Award, California State Teachers' Association; special certificate of merit from the Los Angeles Board of Education. Special Publication: UCLA Committee on Public Lectures and UCLA Graduate School of Education; screening and panel discussion, January, 1972. Used in education classes, 1972 to present.

One teacher said: "It fully documents in ways I never thought possible, the world of the junior high school student and teacher. It is an amazing document and for the life of me, I can't figure out how they did it."

Los Angeles Times: "The finest documentary ever produced on American education. No one should miss it."

Members of the UCLA Graduate School of Education called the documentary, "A landmark publication in the field of education."



The Very Personal Death of Elizabeth Schell Holt-Hartford, a 30-minute documentary on an 82-year-old woman trying to live out her life in dignity. First broadcast on February, 1972, on CBS in Los Angeles.

Awards: Associated Press Certificate of Merit; National Television Broadcast Executives Documentary of the Year.

Los Angeles Times: "A moving, poignant film essay."

The citation from the National Television Broadcast Executive Award for "Documentary of the Year" reads: "In this intimate, reflective study of the decline and approaching death of a single defiant old woman, this public affairs program sharply defined with beauty, dignity and compassion, the inevitable human confrontation with loneliness and death."



Rape, a 30-minute documentary on the crime of rape. First broadcast on CBS in Los Angeles, December, 1972, it achieved the highest rating of any documentary in the history of Los Angeles television. Reprint: January, 1974, CBS in Los Angeles. It is considered the first major television program on the crime of rape.

Awards: Silver Gavel Award, national achievement from the American Bar Association; special Gavel Award Certificate; Ohio State Award, American Exhibition of Educational Radio-Television Programs, the Institute for Education by Radio-Television Telecommunications Center, Ohio State University; Associated Press Certificate of Merit.

Citation: *Rape – How To Avoid It and What To Do About It If You Can't*, by June and Joseph Csida (Books for Living).

Los Angeles Times: “The first and best report on the crime of rape ever presented on television.... Saltzman has an unerring ability to zero in on the flaws in the judicial process as well as public opinion. They refuse to be conned and refuse to con us.”

The Ohio State Award citation reads: “A moving correction of the misunderstanding perpetuated by myth and legal practice surrounding a high crime to the dignity of women.

The Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association reads: “In recognition and commendation of distinguished service in furthering public understanding of the inherent values of the American system of law and the administration of justice.”



Why Me? a one-hour documentary on breast cancer narrated by actress Lee Grant. First broadcast on May 13, 1974 on CBS in Los Angeles, it was the first major television documentary to deal with breast cancer. A landmark documentary. Reprint: September, 1974, CBS in Los Angeles. Reprint: November, 1975, Public Broadcasting Service, more than 250 stations across the country. Funding: 3M Company. Reprint: 1976-77, over the PBS national network. International Distribution: to television stations in Canada, South America, Europe and Asia. 16mm color print, 57 minutes, \$625.00 Carrousel Films Inc.

Awards: Winner of 10 major awards including the Alfred I. duPont/Columbia University Award in Broadcast Journalism; Radio-Television News Association special Golden Mike award for best documentary; American Cancer Society Certificate of Merit; San Francisco State University Broadcast Media Award; three National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Regional Emmy Awards; Greater Los Angeles Press Club Best Television Documentary award; Scripps-Howard Foundation Distinguished Journalism Citation for Outstanding Public Service Reporting.

Los Angeles Times: "In a commendable display of openness, honesty and courage, these women share their stories in *Why Me?*, an excellently prepared documentary about breast cancer. It is not an easy story to tell nor a pleasant subject to deal with, yet Saltzman lets the women tell the story, skillfully creating a narrative by putting together fragments of conversations with the women participants as well as various doctors."

The Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award for Broadcast Journalism reads: "Of many worthy programs on subjects of particular interest to women, the most remarkable unquestionably was this gripping hour on breast cancer. Saltzman tread a narrow path between bathos and tragedy, which he survived with signal success thanks to his own and the participants' impeccable taste and sincerity."

