

Children of War

A one hour documentary series

Children of War unites children conceived during WWII, and their children, with family members they never knew existed.



“War Children” are defined as those born to a native parent and a parent belonging to a foreign military force. Estimates of the number of war children fathered by soldiers during World War II range from the hundreds of thousands into the millions.

While the children of WW II were innocents, the discrimination they faced did not take into account widespread rape by occupying forces, or the relationships women had to form in order to survive. More often not, the children of WWII were not wanted, not recognized, given away, abandoned, or orphaned. To avoid humiliation, disgrace, or worse, their biological mothers concealed their father’s identity. While the soldiers who fathered them never knew of their existence. If their parents survived the war, most went on to marry and start families.

Born of violence rather than love, war children are the issue of humanity at its worst. Severed from their roots, discriminated against because of their parents’ nationality or

religion, they are born into an unfriendly universe. Their children, and their children's children, will surely be infected with generational trauma.

Children of War seeks to unite the lost children of World War II, and their children, with their brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, grandparents and cousins, in the hopes they will feel embraced and welcome for the first time. If we can create new bonds, bonds that can be shared with an international audience, we can inspire the world to unite at a time when we feel the forces of polarization and tyranny upon us.

Pilot Episode. Matias, aged 89, now lives in Kiev. Matias was born in 1941 in Belarus, his mother a teenage Jew, raped by Nazi officer. His life is a testament to the extraordinary resilience of the human spirit. Though his Belarusian mother was shot and killed before Matias reach his first birthday, he will be united with the descendants of his German father.

(note: the names below have been changed, as our protagonist still suffers from persecution almost 90 years later)

Matias' Story

Ileana was a beautiful 19 year old girl when the German Army invaded Belarus in 1941. Her family were Jewish, and went into hiding. Their luck did not hold out.

Her family was caught and murdered, but Ileana was kept alive for the sexual use of an SS officer. One night when her rapist was drunk, Ileana escaped. She made her way through the woods to the cottage of a distant non-Jewish relative, Baba Vera. The kindly Baba was determined to protect the young woman.

Ileana soon discovered that she was pregnant. Several months later, Matias was born in Baba Vera's house.

When baby Matias became ill, Ileana, who's only ID stated she was Jewish, had to make the 20km trip to a friendly doctor over the border to Ovruch.

On her journey to Ovruch, Ileana was spotted by the SS officer who had raped her repeatedly and fathered her child. The SS officer shot her on the spot. The bullet passed through her head and young Matias.

Local collaborators, whose job was to bury the bodies of the dead in mass graves at the edge of town, discovered that the baby was still alive, despite the bullet wound which had scraped his spine that would later lead to scoliosis. The bullet was extracted and baby Matias was saved. He was secretly returned to Baba under the condition that Baba and her family must leave their home before anyone found out.

Baba fled Belarus with three children—her own son and daughter, and Matias. But nowhere was safe. Constantly on the move, Baba, Matias and her two children survived the war.

Living in the post war Soviet Union without papers proved difficult. Finding work was nearly impossible. Having no means to support the three children, Baba gave them up

to an orphanage. But even this act of desperation was blocked by the KGB who knew about Matias's background. A nurse warned Baba that the state was preparing to move her children to a camp for 'socially unfit' children in Kazakhstan. It was, in fact, a death camp. Once again, Baba fled with the children.

By 1952 Baba managed to forge an identity for young Matias that did not include the word Jewish, or German, on it. Baba, Matias and her children became part of the wave of immigrants to Odessa which the Soviets were repopulating after clearing out ethnic Germans.

Around age nine, Matias's health improved and he began attending school. He graduated with distinction and, later, earned a degree in as an electrical engineer. He could not, however, escape his past. His first job in Kyrgyzstan ended when his secret was discovered and he was told Jewish Nazi bastards were not welcome.

Matias returned to Ukraine and in subsequent jobs was much more careful in not revealing his past. He worked his way up the ranks of the state electricity company to the point where he was promoted to Chief Engineer of the Odessa region. Then the all-seeing KGB, knowing his background, stepped in, once again, forcing him to resign.

Matias now lives the life of a retired pensioner: tending his garden. There's a pronounced scar on his neck from a bullet that killed his mother and through him on that horrific day 77 years before. That bullet from a gun fired by his father.

What lessons can we draw from the life of one man, one who has somehow survived against odds stacked spectacularly against him? As a person who has suffered mercilessly at the hands of tyrannical regimes, Matias's message to those who wield power is more direct: always remember, above all, that you are a human being just like everybody else. Humanity, he is convinced, will survive as long as there are mothers such as Baba Vera, in the world. If he could do one thing, he would raise a monument for her and those like her.