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MOVIE REVIEW | 'AHEAD OF TIME'

What She Saw: A Life's Dispatches

By ANDY WEBSTER

The career of Ruth Gruber — reporter, photographer, civil servant, memoirist, humanitarian — is remarkable, and not only for a woman of her generation. Not that the indefatigable but mild-mannered Ms. Gruber, now 98, would trumpet its singularity; to her it probably simply makes sense, given the aspirations of her youth. But “[Ahead of Time](#),” a graceful documentary portrait directed by Bob Richman, illustrates just how extraordinary her life has been.

[Ms. Gruber](#), a riveting raconteur born in 1911 and raised in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, was determined to see the world. Entering [New York University](#) at 15, she became smitten with her German professor and with German culture in general. She learned the language, which helped land her a stay at the University of Cologne, where she earned a doctorate at 20. She also witnessed a [Hitler](#) rally, an unforgettably terrifying experience.

By 1936 she was in the Soviet Union, reporting for The New York Herald Tribune; by 1941, she was filing reports from Alaska for Harold L. Ickes, Roosevelt’s secretary of the interior, describing its suitability for homesteading soldiers. But World War II and its aftermath were her finest hours: she secretly escorted Holocaust refugees to America in 1944 and documented the attack on the refugee boat Exodus by the British in 1947.

In addition to its chronological narrative — which barely mentions her first marriage (to Philip H. Michaels, a lawyer) and has even less about her second (to Henry Rosner, a onetime official in the New York City Department of Human Resources), to say nothing of her efforts on behalf of Jews after Israel’s founding — “Ahead of Time” follows Ms. Gruber to speaking engagements and encounters with relatives and old friends. Ever present are her lucid memory and articulate, compassionate bearing. She is an inspiration for career women, certainly, but also for us all.

AHEAD OF TIME

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Directed by Bob Richman; director of photography, Mr. Richman; edited by Sabin Krayenbuhl; music by Ted Reichman; production design, Zeva Oelbaum; producer, Ms. Oelbaum; voice-overs by [Eli Wallach](#), Therese Plummer and Jody Shelton; released by Reel Inheritance

Films. In English and Hebrew, with English subtitles. At the Angelika Film Center, Mercer and Houston Streets, Greenwich Village. Running time: 1 hour 13 minutes. This film is not rated.

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