

once removed

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Fact Sheet

TITLE

Once Removed

FORMAT

Color, 52 minutes, NTSC video on beta SP
English and Chinese with English subtitles

DESCRIPTION

A young woman travels to China to meet her mother's family for the first time, and gets caught in a web of politics and history. Weaving together dreams, archival footage, and scenes from her relatives' lives, she meditates on the complications of remembering and forgetting the past.

SCREENINGS

Premiere: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA: December-March 1999
Festivals: BFVF Award, New England Film and Video Festival: March 2000
Film Fest New Haven: April 2000
Roxbury Film Festival: August 2000
First Place, National Council on Family Relations Media Competition
Artists' Television Access, San Francisco, MA: October 2002
Other:

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR/WRITER

Julie Mallozzi

CO-WRITER

Rebecca Sherman

MUSIC

Shih-Hui Chen

FUNDERS

The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, LEF Foundation, Massachusetts Media Fellowship, Harvard Film Study Center

U.S. DISTRIBUTION

First Run/Icarus Films, Inc., 32 Court Street 21st floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201 USA
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About the Makers

Producer/Director/Writer

Julie Mallozzi grew up in rural Ohio with a Chinese mother and an Italian-American father. She graduated in 1992 from Harvard University's film program, where she studied with Robb Moss, Alfred Guzzetti, and Dick Rogers. After a year in Ecuador, during which she co-founded an English magazine, she worked on several films, including "Pictures from a Revolution" about a photographer's experiences in Nicaragua, "Americas," a ten-part series about Latin America, and "Born Under the Red Flag," third program in a trilogy about contemporary Chinese history. Most recently, she produced the China segment of "Six Billion and Beyond," about reproductive health and population growth. "Once Removed" is her debut as a filmmaker.

Co-Writer

Rebecca Sherman is Mallozzi's friend and former roommate at Harvard University, where she studied History and Literature. She writes on cultural issues, human rights, and public health. Her work has been included in "Atlas of the Baby Boom Generation" and "Human Rights: the Essential Reference."

Senior Producer

Kathryn Dietz co-produced "China in Revolution," "The Mao Years," and "Born Under the Red Flag," which comprise a trilogy about Chinese history this century. Before forming Ambrica Productions, she worked at WGBH-TV in Boston, with credits on "Frontline: The Russians are Here," "Vietnam: A Television History," and "Frontline Special Report: Castro's Challenge." Dietz currently is producing a documentary on Eleanor Roosevelt.

Composer

Born in Taiwan, Shih-Hui Chen lives in the United States where she received her doctoral degree in music composition from Boston University. Her music has been played in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Germany, and the United States, and by groups including the Philadelphia and Cleveland Symphony Orchestras and the Arditti String Quartet. Ms. Chen has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer Foundation, the Tanglewood Music Center, and the Bunting Institute. Recent performances include a solo composition recital in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Shih-Hui Chen is a winner of the 1999 American Academy in Rome Prize, and the 2000 Guggenheim Fellowship.

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The Film

“What’s important: the thing that happened, or the thing that’s remembered?”

A young woman travels to China to meet her mother’s family after a 50-year separation. She discovers that her intellectual relatives have faced persecution, imprisonment, and even murder during China’s convulsive political movements.

“Once Removed,” a one-hour documentary, focuses on three of filmmaker Julie Mallozzi’s relatives: a scientist whose life was disrupted by politics, a professor whose life was ended by politics, and a government official who works her life around politics. Weaving together dreams, historical footage, and scenes from her relatives’ lives, the filmmaker meditates on the complications of remembering and forgetting the past.

Mallozzi first visits her great-uncle Wang Shou-Jue, a scientist who pioneered the development of computer chips in China. He shows her his research, and talks about the Cultural Revolution, when he swept floors and fed furnaces: “physical hard work that didn’t use the brain.” The filmmaker makes realizes, “I studied the Cultural Revolution in college, but somehow it never occurred to me to think about my family living through these events.”

She then investigates the 1940s murder of her grandmother’s favorite brother, Fei Gong. A political science professor who promoted democracy in China, Fei Gong was kidnapped and murdered by the Nationalists, and later declared a revolutionary martyr by the Communists. Mallozzi retraces Fei Gong’s last steps to a foggy dock in Chongqing and the site of the chemical pool where his corpse supposedly was dissolved. “Do you think there is no chemical pool?” she asks her doubtful cousin Mimi as they walk through the desolate site. “I’m beginning to think this history isn’t true.” The filmmaker’s nightmares intensify as she gets caught in a tangled web of propaganda, family, and memory.

The film ends with a visit to Aunt Fei Shi-Cheng, the first cousin of Mallozzi’s mother and an energetic government official in the family’s hometown of Suzhou. She proudly shows Suzhou’s new development, but also cries about her father’s persecution and his parting words: “In loving my country I was not mistaken. I have not done my country wrong, or the Communist party wrong. Someday my name will be cleared.” The filmmaker prepares to leave China, realizing that, “For my relatives, the cost of remembering the past is high. For me, it’s a kind of luxury. But I need to recover my family’s past because I’m afraid of living without memories.

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Praise for Once Removed

"Very inspiring.... subtle, serious, thoughtful. It looks at complex, even messy, personal and historical events without trying to resolve them."

— Ross McElwee ("Sherman's March," "Time Indefinite")

"An authentic portrait from a most unusual angle...the film brings us back to the muted suffering of the film-maker's relatives, all eminent Chinese intellectuals...certainly a departure from the usual crap of touristy films about China. I intend to use it in my core course on contemporary Chinese culture..

— Professor Leo Ou-Fan Lee, Harvard University

"A good balance of the informational and the personal... she culls eloquent images from the video footage and uses them well, with a nice, spare score by Shih-Hui Chen."

— Betsy Sherman, Boston Globe

"Mallozzi deftly and subtly takes the personal and makes it political. She raises questions that apply to us all... Once Removed is an excellent addition for high school, academic, and public libraries."

— Helen McCullough
MC Journal: the Journal of Academic Media Librarianship

"Ingratiatingly unpretentious."

— Gerald Peary, Boston Phoenix

"An amazing personal tale with a thoroughly engaging mix of historical materials and gorgeous footage of Mallozzi's journey... this should be seen and enjoyed."

— Bruce Jenkins, Curator, Harvard Film Archive