



**WRITE ME**

A film by Pearl Gluck  
Adapted from a poem by  
Deborah Kahan Kolb

(USA, 2019; 7 minutes)



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**WRITE ME** (2019; 6 minutes)  
A short film by Pearl Gluck

**LOGLINE:**

*Write Me* follows an older woman who joins other survivors in reclaiming the histories tattooed on their bodies. The film is adapted from and driven by an award-winning poem, “After Auschwitz,” written by Deborah Kahan Kolb.

**POET’S STATEMENT: Deborah Kahan Kolb**  
(a copy of the poem is available below)

I grew up listening to stories of the concentration camps from my Holocaust survivor grandparents. These horror stories were practically woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. As children, my siblings and I flipped through pages of old family photo albums and understood as a matter of fact that more than half of the people we saw in the pictures were no longer alive, that they were all murdered because they were Jews.

My grandparents, along with most of their peers - their fellow sufferers, their fellow witnesses - are now gone. In my view, telling the stories of the trauma of the Holocaust is ever more urgent, as the number of survivors dwindles rapidly and displays of anti-Semitism escalate alarmingly. Most of those who endured the atrocities of man’s inhumanity to man are no longer here to bear witness. It’s up to us – the poets, the writers, the storytellers – to take up the banner of witness-bearing, to tell and retell these stories to future generations, so that the world is not allowed to forget.

I’ve always been looking for ways to make poetry more generally accessible, and I thought film would be a compelling vehicle to bring poetry and its particular message to a broader audience.

A few years back my husband’s octogenarian uncle, the last Holocaust survivor of our families, did something extraordinary: he removed the Auschwitz tattoo from his arm. He’d had enough, he said, of the Nazis owning him. I was inspired to write the poem “Re(vision)” which is essentially the story of an older man, branded in violence, who decides in the twilight of his life to reclaim his body and redefine his life.

I reached out to Pearl Gluck, herself a grandchild of Holocaust survivors. Pearl and I have a shared childhood experience in the Hasidic enclave so deeply informed by a diasporic past. Her work also engages themes of Judaism, women, and faith. Pearl wrote and directed the script for *Write Me* adapted from my poem “After Auschwitz,” which invokes the memory of all the minority groups who were marked for death by Hitler: the Jews, the communists and the cripples, the homosexuals and the Romani gypsies. The poem is a call to poets to “write me” – to give life, in poetry, to those who were killed so that they are not lost to history. She added the element of brandings in the world of domestic sex trafficking and how survivors struggle to cover up their own tattoos much like my Uncle Bernie did with his arm.

The resulting short film fuses the experiences of myriad sufferers and survivors, all with one goal: ownership of one’s body and identity.

**DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT: Pearl Gluck**

All my life, at least the short part when I got to spend time with my grandmother, Frida, sitting across her kitchen table, sharing family celebrations with her, holding her hand through her last moments in a hospital bed, I couldn’t see past the number tattooed on her forearm. The number is A-9106. She got that

number in Auschwitz against her will in 1944, and wore it, I thought, as a badge of courage, of decided survival. Despite what she suffered, she held strong to her faith, her femininity, and her vitality. Two generations after she came to the United States from Hungary through Ellis Island, I was born, a first generation American, into the Hasidic tradition and speaking Yiddish as my first language. In her honor, I believe, much of my work as a filmmaker has been centered in unflinching women's voices, my own approach to the Hasidic faith of my youth, and activism. Both she and the number tattooed on her body have left a mark.

Many years after my grandmother passed away, I directed a feature film, *The Turn Out*, which was a story about a trucker who helps a young woman being trafficked at his local truckstop. In the process of researching the film, I met survivors of trafficking in Ohio, specifically Jennifer Kempton who founded Survivor's Ink, an organization that replaces brandings tattooed on women by their traffickers. I learned how some women, despite escaping their oppressors, feel the bondage of their servitude until they can cover up or remove their tattoos and brandings. In the process of crafting a narrative script based on my research, some elements of the complicated and darkly intricate world of trafficking were left for another project. This aspect was one of them.

When Deborah Kahan Kolb shared her poetry with me and discussed her uncle Bernie's desire to remove his Auschwitz tattoo, I was inspired to combine the narratives of these women and allow them to inspire each other intergenerationally, allow them to empower each other interculturally, find common ground in women's intention to survive. My experience of working with many survivors of the Holocaust, specifically women, they seem to present sanitized stories of their experience, with no mention of rapes and sex trafficking, though we are aware that large number of women and some boys and men were victims of trafficking during the Holocaust as well. For me the interlayering of these stories based on Ms. Kolb's poem and her appreciation for the written word, felt apt. From these connections, the script for "Write Me" was born.

It was at the moment that the script was completed, and as I was typing the last scene, I found myself writing my grandmother's number, A-9106, and we kept it there.

My hope is that the language of the poetry and the images of the film interconnect in "Write Me" and encourage dialogue.

## CAST:

### LYNN COHEN | Frida



This is Lynn Cohen's third film project with Pearl Gluck. Lynn Cohen's roles on film and television have ranged from Mags In THE HUNGER GAMES to Golda Meir in Steven Spielberg's MUNICH and Maman in Louis Malle's VANYA ON 42<sup>ND</sup> STREET to the nanny Magda in SEX AND THE CITY (both the two movies and the TV series). Included among her many other movie and TV credits are Woody Allen's MANHATTAN MURDER MYSTERY and DECONSTRUCTING HARRY; EAGLE EYE; INVINCIBLE; THE EXTRA MAN; EVERYBODY'S FINE; HELLO LONESOME; LAW AND ORDER; NURSE JACKIE, DAMAGES, and BORED TO DEATH. On the New York stage, she has appeared in such plays as Tina Howe's CHASING MANET (with Jane Alexander), HAMLET (with Kevin Kline), MACBETH (with Liev Schreiber), ORPHEUS DESCENDING (with Vanessa Redgrave), and ISRAEL HOROVITZ'S NEW SHORTS with Barefoot Theatre Company. Awards include a Fox Fellowship; a Richard Seff Award from Actors Equity Association; a Screen Actors Guild ensemble award (for SEX AND THE CITY), and a Bowden Award from New Dramatists. Barefoot Theatre Company Ensemble Member.

### VIRGINIA ELWOOD | Lily



This is Virginia Elwood's first acting role. Regarded as one of the top tattoo artists in the world, Virginia Elwood is also the co-owner of [Saved Tattoo](#) in Brooklyn NY. She is a New York native who started tattooing in Boston in 2001. Specializing in bold colorful work and black and grey portraiture, Virginia's tattoos are influenced by traditional Americana, propaganda posters, textiles and folk art from an array of cultures and time periods. In her personal artwork Virginia attempts to marry the simplicity of traditional tattoos with non-traditional subject matter and mediums. In recent works, she has been exploring lino cuts, sculpture, porcelain painting and other mixed media. Her work on skin and paper has been prominently featured tattoo art-related publications, projects such as the NY Historical Society, Zadig and Voltaire, and press, including *NY Times*, *Vogue* and *Complex*. Write Me also features original art and sculpture by Virginia Elwood.

## CREW BIOS:

PEARL GLUCK | Director, Producer, Writer



[IMDb PAGE »](#)

Pearl Gluck was awarded a Sundance Producer's Lab fellowship for *Divan* (2004), her first documentary film which was developed on a Fulbright grant to Hungary. Her films have won prizes such as Best Actor, Best Film, Best Debut Feature and Best LGBT Short at festivals at festivals worldwide. *Divan* was broadcast on the Sundance Channel, theatrically premiered at the Film Forum in NYC, played at festivals worldwide, and is distributed by Zeitgeist Films. Her short, *Where Is Joel Baum* (2012), which stars Lynn Cohen won various awards at festivals including Best Actor for Luzer Twersky at the Starz Denver Film Festival.

Her first fiction feature, *The Turn Out*, exploring domestic sex trafficking at truckstops, won Best Debut Feature at Toronto's Female Eye Film Festival among other awards. Her short film, *Junior* (2017), won three Best Actress awards for Elle Jae Stewart, and her award-winning short, *Summer* (2018), is about to be released by Film Movement. Her previous work includes a TV doc, *Soundwalk: Williamburg* (2007), which won an Audie Award, a short film that she co-wrote, *Goyta* (2007), which premiered at Cannes, and *Great Balls of Fire* (2001), which screened at Transmediale, Oberhausen, and at the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Pearl has been interviewed about her work on NPR with Melissa Block, WBUR's The Connection with Chris Leiden, WBAI, and other outlets internationally. She has appeared in *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1998; Directed by Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum). Pearl teaches screenwriting and directing at Penn State University. Her work can be seen at: [palinkapictures.com](http://palinkapictures.com).

DEBORAH KAHAN KOLB | Poet, Producer

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Deborah Kahan Kolb currently lives in the Bronx. Much of her writing



reflects the unique experiences and challenges of growing up in the insular world of Hasidic Judaism. Deborah earned her BA and MA degrees in English/Creative Writing from Queens College, where she served as editor of the QC Journal of Jewish Studies and was the recipient of the James E. Tobin Poetry Award, the Lois Hughson Essay Prize, and the Essay Prize in Holocaust/Genocide Studies. Her work has been selected as a finalist for the Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Award and an Honorable Mention in the 2019 *Glimmer Train* Fiction Open. Deborah is a winner of the 2018 Bronx Council on the Arts BRIO Award for poetry, and her debut collection, entitled *Windows and a Looking Glass* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), was a finalist for the 2016 New

Women's Voices Chapbook Competition. Deborah's work has appeared or is forthcoming in various print and online publications, including *Poetica*, *Voices Israel*, *New Verse News*, *Shirim*, *Literary Mama*, *3Elements Review*, *Tuck*, *Poets Reading the News*, *Rise Up Review*, *Writers Resist*, *Paddock Review*, *PRISM*, *Mom Egg Review*, and *Veils, Halos & Shackles*, an anthology of international poetry addressing the oppression and empowerment of women. Her website and more information about her work can be found at [www.deborahkahankolb.com](http://www.deborahkahankolb.com).

NIAV CONTY | Director of Photography



Nivav Conty's films span darkly humorous investigations of the transgressive and taboo, intimate and troubling coming-of-age portraits, and cutting-edge Machinima. She is an active freelance director, cinematographer and screenwriter in New York City.

She moved to France to begin making films, where she studied with Boris Lehman and Pedro Costa, and worked closely for many years with Oscar-winning maverick director Joseph Strick, then returned to New York in 2010 to study with avant-garde filmmaker Chantal Akerman and complete her M.F.A. at City College. She has DP'd over a dozen short films and documentaries as well as 3 feature films. She is a recipient of the Kodak Award for cinematography, and the 2013 Princess Grace Award. Her shorts; *Forever*, *Outworld* and *Joy Ride* have toured festivals worldwide and received numerous awards. She is currently in post production on *Small Time*, her feature shot in Bradford County Pennsylvania.

#### MLADAN JURKOVIC | Editor



Mladan Jurkovic was born in Croatia, and grew up in Seattle. He attended the graduate film program at Ohio University where he focused on the areas of Directing, Editing, and Sound Mixing. He has worked as sound mixer on twelve feature films, and spent time in Vietnam working as a director for television commercials. He directed a trilogy of short films with modern fairytale themes, "Root of all Evil," "Birds of Paradise," and "Lightwalkers." He currently lives in Los Angeles and works as a production sound mixer and video editor.

#### LISA GUTKIN | Composer



Lisa Gutkin is best known as violinist, vocalist, and Grammy-winning songwriter for the world renowned klezmer band The Klezmatics, for her appearance in *Sex and the City*, for her work with Sting in his Broadway production "The Last Ship," and most recently as co-composer and on-stage musician for Paula Vogel's Tony-award winning play *INDECENT* which opened on Broadway in April 2017. Lisa's acclaim includes the title of "one hot fiddler" by Cyndi Lauper, "hauntingly emotional" vocals according to the *L.A. Times*, having her song "Gonna Get Through This World," composed with the lyrics of Woody Guthrie described by Pete Seeger as "a piece of genius" and the 2006 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary World Music Album of the Year. She was a founding member of the Celtic group Whirligig, a long-standing member of house band of the Fast Folk Songwriter's Collective, and has composed for film and television.

#### JENNIFER KEMPTON | Survivor of Trafficking and Activist



Jennifer Kempton was a survivor of human trafficking who used her experience to promote awareness and advocate for social change. During her horrific time on the streets she was branded and sold by her abusers. After obtaining her freedom, these marks became constant reminders of her abuse until she was given a gift of a tattoo cover-up. The liberation she experienced through covering her brands inspired her to found Survivor's Ink. Survivor's Ink exists to raise awareness and to empower human trafficking victims by breaking the psychological chains of enslavement through beautifying, removing or covering their physical scars, markings and brandings that are constant reminders of a

violent past.

Founded by Kempton, Survivor's Ink offers full scholarships to survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation to have their branding tattoo's covered or removed. For more information:  
[www.survivorsink.org](http://www.survivorsink.org)

For more information on Write Me: [pearl@palinkapictures.com](mailto:pearl@palinkapictures.com)

PRESS FROM OUR FIRST POETRY/Sneak Peek EVENT:

May 10, 2019

BRONX NET TV – NYC:

<https://www.bronxnet.org/watch/videos/7147/?topicId=5>

## After Auschwitz

I am vague I am hazy I am indistinct

I am bodiless-  
but my black Romani blood river runs  
boils and bubbles and  
pushes up Piotr's daisies  
I am faceless-  
but my non-Aryan features glow searing hot  
my crippled mouth and communist eyes  
coal to cinder  
fuel to Himmler's furnaces  
the fog of my Jewish bones  
blurs Wladyslaw's farmhouse  
my homosexual tongue a licking lapping flame  
a hideous gape, a burning yawning mask  
my embers smolder in the wake of the Zyklon B  
that fumigated my lungs  
and left me breathless, voiceless, mute.  
Silent.

...so I am nameless...

I am vague I am hazy I am indistinct

Write me, Paul Celan  
-your neighbor from Czernowitz  
Write me, Nelly Sachs  
-your neighbor from Berlin  
Write me, Miklós Radnóti  
-your neighbor from Budapest

Give me a body and fill me in and grant me life.  
Birth me-  
for oblivion awaits  
Birth me-  
lest I disappear  
from the awareness of humanity  
into the amnesia of history  
...vapor and ash...

Adorno was wrong - there must be poetry.

Write me.

- Deborah Kahan Kolb  
*Voices Israel Anthology* (2015)  
*Windows and a Looking Glass* (Finishing Line Press, 2017)  
*Shirim Journal* (Dryad Press, reprint forthcoming 2019)