



## Technical Specifications

There was a Little Girl

A film by Ruth Peyser

©2010

Color

Stereo

Runtime: 25:08

Formats available: DVD NTSC, Digi Beta, Quicktime movie

Aspect ratio: 1.33:1

Country of Production: USA

The film was made in Adobe After Effects, with some editing in Final Cut Pro



## Synopsis

Ruth Peyser's *There was a Little Girl* is an autobiographical film spanning fifty years, from 1959 to 2009. Ruth tells six stories from her life set ten years apart, each on a backdrop of political and social events of that year. The film explores her personal growth and the relationships of three generations of women in her family, using animation and manipulated found images.

The film opens in 1959 when Ruth was a little girl. The late 1950s was a time full of new inventions and products, many directed toward children. Disneyland had recently been completed, Barbie dolls hit the toy stores, and the space race was at its height. We see this era through the eyes of a child as Ruth tells the story of a shopping trip to Woolworths with her mother. An unexpected turn of events sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the little girl and her mother.

The next episode in 1969 shows a very different world. The war in Vietnam and the massive protests opposing it reflect a society full of conflict and contradictions. The little girl is now a teenager. She strongly supports the anti-war movement and identifies with the peace, love and pot smoking culture. When her mother sends her for a doctor's check up, she encounters a situation that mirrors the discord of the time.

In 1979, Ruth leaves Australia and goes to New York, eager to reinvent herself. She builds her new life in the New York of the 1970s and 1980s, a city renowned for its innovation and creativity that attracted many disaffected young people at that time. Later in the film she becomes a mother and is presented with some of the same challenges that her own mother faced.

Each decade brings its own unique set of events, but over the course of 50 years, it becomes apparent that the underlying causes have many similarities. Ruth's personal narrative is set within this context. She wonders whether this immutability is also inevitable in her life. She draws parallels between her personal life and the larger world around and examines the effect they have on each other. She considers how much we are a product of the time period we live in and how the fabric of society is transformed as the world changes.

The film employs a wide range of visual styles and techniques. It combines hand drawn animation with manipulated found footage and stills. It is rough and edgy, creating a feel that corresponds to the mood of the stories being told. The soundtrack is built using the same approach. The music is largely true to its time period. There are deviations from this basic structure where the filmmaker uses a segment of found imagery or sound from a different era that thematically melds with the story being told. This helps unify the film and gives a sense of the cyclic nature of ideas and events.

*There was a Little Girl* is part animation, part documentary and part personal narrative. It is open, honest and penetrating, at times exuding discomfort, but also warm and funny. It is a densely layered film full of correlations and juxtapositions, relentlessly exposing the ironies that engulf us all.



## Ruth Peyser: Bio

Ruth Peyser arrived in New York from Australia in 1978 and has been making animated films ever since. Her award-winning films have been screened on public television and at hundreds of festivals in the United States and throughout the world.

Ruth completed *Another Great Day* in 1980, a film she made in collaboration with Jo Bonney. As young women who had recently moved to New York, they were examining their life choices. The "norm" was for women to marry and have children. They felt that other options were just as valid. They developed the idea for the film from their many discussions. *Another Great Day* depicts a day in the life of a housewife and her baby. TV, radio and pulp novels fill her day as she routinely performs her chores. Ruth and Jo were surprised at the positive public response. The film was shown at many festivals worldwide, won awards at some, and was also shown on PBS stations throughout the United States.

They continued their collaboration and completed *Random Positions* in 1983. This film examined the acceptable but often destructive roles people play with themselves and others in sexual relationships.

By the mid-1980s Ruth had been playing guitar in no wave bands for a number of years. In 1985, when she was playing in BUMP, she made an animated music video using one of their songs. *One Nation Under TV* uses hand colored and manipulated sequential photographs set to discordant music to tell the story of Bob, a hopelessly bored and depressed TV addict who undergoes a series of nonsensical self-destructive acts while glued to the tube. The manipulative and addictive qualities of mainstream media is a theme in many of Ruth's films.

Ruth completed her fourth animated film in 1988. *Covered in Fleas* was loosely based on her own experience. The film traces an hour in the life of Lulu, a neurotic, urban everywoman. After a harrowing walk home from work, Lulu returns to her apartment, where unemployed boyfriend J.J. watches TV. They argue, J.J. walks out and Lulu is left to contemplate matters as best as she knows how. Unlike her earlier films, which used manipulated sequential photographs, *Covered in Fleas* was entirely hand drawn. The illustrations have an edgy, underground comics feel.

In the early 1990s, Ruth received funding from the Independent Television Service (ITVS), which made it possible for her to make *Go to Hell*. The film examines a woman's fears about her life. When she is in a dreamlike state, she is trapped in a world that is frightening and out of her control. In her conscious state she reencounters the disturbing characters and incidents from her dream, can cope with them confidently, and easily overcomes them.

In 1993 ITVS funded Side-Kicks Productions to create *Animated Women*, a series for public television about four animators. *Mood*, the third episode of the series, was devoted to Ruth and her work. The series aired on PBS stations throughout the United States, was awarded a CINE Golden Eagle and picked up other prizes and honors at film festivals around the country.

Ruth completed *Go to Hell* a few weeks before she had her second daughter. It was difficult for her to make films while the children were growing up, as Ruth neither had the time nor the money she once devoted to filmmaking. During this time Ruth wrote. She jotted down ideas for films and also wrote many short stories about her life. When her children were teenagers she started developing a coherent concept for a film from her writings. This evolved into her most recent film, *There was a Little Girl*, which Ruth completed in 2010. It is an autobiographical film spanning fifty years, from 1959 to 2009. Ruth tells six stories from her life set ten years apart, each on a backdrop of political and social events of that year. It explores her personal growth and the relationships of three generations of women in her family. The film uses animation, manipulated found footage and stills to tell the stories.



## Director's Statement

I started making animated films in 1980 as a vehicle to tell my stories, convey my social and political concerns and as a means to express myself as a visual artist. I earn my living as a graphic designer, which doesn't fulfill my need for self-expression. Making my own films has no restrictions. It is my art. It's unpaid.

By 1996 I had two children and no husband. There was no longer time to make films. Bringing up my children became my creative project. As with all creative projects I thought a lot about it. At times it was a struggle, at other times it was sheer joy. Mostly I was so busy I barely had time to notice how I was feeling, but my lifelong patterns of behavior kept staring me in the face. I had no clue how to be a parent. I was constantly analyzing and examining the family dynamic, and how best to deal with all the unexpected things that kids do. My gut level responses were uncomfortably revealing. It was important for me to examine my own childhood. Memories, thoughts and observations flooded through my head. I wrote them down. Over the years I accumulated a large body of work. As my time was so fragmented I couldn't get my head around building a coherent picture, but the pieces made sense in a visceral way.

The impossible happened and my daughters became teenagers. Finally I had time to slowly, very slowly, start making films again, and my journals seemed the natural source to draw from. Gathering meaning from them, discovering connections, understanding that no story, observation or thought was isolated, was like a purging, a release, of the sadness, anger, and confusion that I had carried with me for way too long. And I was exploding with a desire to do artwork, shape a story that would be not only be meaningful to me, but would also have more significance. It was wonderful to be immersed in a project again. I had no idea what the outcome would be, but I knew I would love the process.

It took quite a while to work out what I wanted to convey in *There was a Little Girl*. My writings were about myself as a daughter and then a mother, and often examined my relationship with my mother and my daughters. The film evolved into a story about three generations of women in my family spanning fifty years. It was apparent how we were partly shaped by the time period we grew up in, so I decided to use world events as a unifying thread, in tandem with my stories. I wasn't sure how putting my personal narrative in the context of the bigger picture would work, what it would say, but it conceptually made sense. The fun of making a film is to let it spin out of control and discover things that I couldn't conceive of beforehand.

I didn't draw any conclusions when I was making the film. The parallels, incongruities and ironies formed on their own. I don't believe there are conclusions, just observations and discoveries.

I hope *There was a Little Girl* has meaning beyond a personal narrative, that there is universality in its themes. I hope they make people think about their lives. There is nothing special about mine. I just tried to examine it as honestly as I could.



## Logline

A story spanning fifty years exploring the relationships of three generations of women.

## Short Synopsis

*There was a Little Girl* is an autobiographical film spanning fifty years, from 1959 to 2009. The filmmaker tells six stories from her life set ten years apart, each on a backdrop of political and social events of that year. It explores her personal growth and the relationships of three generations of women in her family. The film uses animation, manipulated found footage and stills to tell the stories.

## Short Bio

Ruth Peyser arrived in New York from Australia in 1978 and has been making animated films since 1980. Her award-winning films have been screened on public television and at hundreds of festivals in the United States and throughout the world. A half hour segment of the PBS series *Animated Women* was devoted to her and her work.

Her films include *Another Great Day*, *Random Positions*, *One Nation under TV*, *Covered in Fleas*, *Go to Hell* and *There was a Little Girl*.



## Awards and Screenings

Jury's Choice (1st Prize): 29th Black Maria Film + Video Festival, 2010 (USA)

32nd Big Muddy Film Festival, 2010 (USA)

Womanimation! 2010 (USA)

53rd International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film, 2010 (Germany)

Anthology Film Archives, New York, 2011 (USA)

Tricky Women 2011, Vienna (Austria)

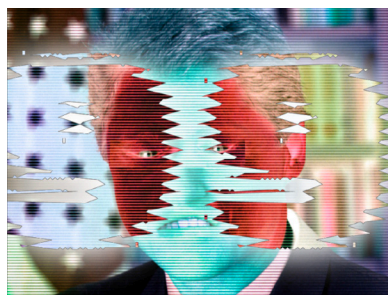
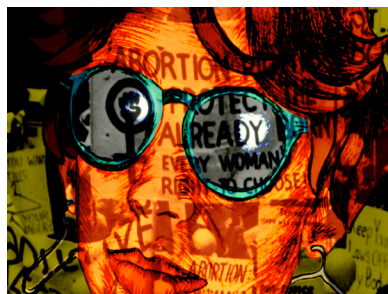
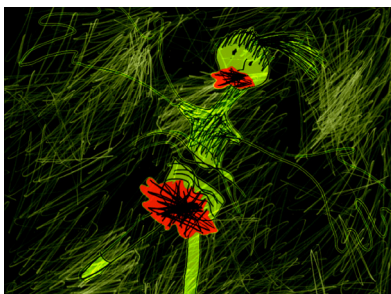
Jerusalem Film Festival, 2011 (Israel)





## Stills

Email [ruthpeyserfilm@gmail.com](mailto:ruthpeyserfilm@gmail.com) to request the following stills and director photo.  
Please indicate preferred file format, resolution and dimensions.





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