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# FREEDOM'S FURY

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CITY

# Artist 'owes everything' to Ottawa

## Siblings who grew up in city to unveil documentary on Hungary, Soviet Union strife

BY HATTIE KLOTZ

Two Ottawa siblings are ringing their feature documentary about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the infamous Hungary vs. Soviet Union water polo match to Ottawa for its Canadian premiere.

Colin Keith Gray and Megan Raney Aarons (a.k.a. the Sibs) are a writing-directing team who now live in Venice, California.

Their second feature documentary, *Freedom's Fury*, covers what has been dubbed the bloodiest game in Olympic history. They have a third, *Prisoners of War*, currently in production. They have made numerous commercials for clients such as the GAP, Banana Republic and Old Navy, and include productions for Discovery and PBS on their credits.

"Put simply, I owe everything that I am as a political activist to Ottawa."

editing suite at her house."

Mr. Gray and Ms. Raney Aarons grew up on Echo Drive in Ottawa, where Mr. Gray, now 38, attended Lisgar Collegiate before going on to the University of Michigan to study political science and French literature.

Ms. Raney Aarons, 29, went to Riverview Alternative School before moving to England with her mother to finish high school and study film and sociology at the University of London, Goldsmith's College.

The film has been five years in the making, but really it's a story that Mr. Gray has been waiting to tell for 20 years, since his high school years on the Lisgar water polo team and the Ottawa Titans city team, and his selection to the water polo team at the University of Michigan, where he was coached by a Hungarian, Ben Quittner.



Colin Keith Gray and Megan Raney Aarons made *Freedom's Fury*, a film on the relations and bloody polo match between Hungary and the Soviet Union.

ASHLEY FRASER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN





# FREEDOM'S FURY

thing that I am as a politically committed artist, social justice activist and water polo enthusiast to Ottawa," said Mr. Gray.

"Sounds grand, but it's the truth. Though I haven't lived here for 20 years now, whenever someone asks me where I'm from, I say, simply ... Ottawa. I have amazing memories of sometimes skating to school in the winter and also seeing Trudeau and his sons skating on the canal while he was prime minister, with no security in sight. You gotta love Ottawa."

*Freedom's Fury* is the story of the Hungarian water polo team and its 1956 semi-final Olympic match in Melbourne against the Soviet Union.

The game came to stand for far more than a sporting endeavour — it became one of the most politically charged games in sporting history and one that ended in violence, with player Ervin Zador receiving a blow to the eye and head that left blood streaming down his face and into the water.

"It was far more than just a sporting event," explained Mr. Zador, a member of that gold-medal-winning team and one of the first surviving team members to sign onto the film project.

"It was a battle for the spirit, for our freedom, for democracy. We won at the Olympics, we lost in the streets."

While the sportsmen battled it out in the swimming pool in Melbourne, back home in Hungary, the Soviet Union brutally crushed the Hungarian Revolution, killing and injuring tens of thousands of people and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee the country.

About 28,000 Hungarians

an, Ben Quittner.

Mr. Quittner has since become the water polo consultant for the film.

"It all started here in Ottawa, really, as one of my best friends, Barclay Easton, was Hungarian and it was my first understanding of another culture," said Mr. Gray.

"Then, of course, it tied with my love for water polo. When Megan thought it was a fabulous story and another producer with whom we were working at the time confirmed it, we decided to try to make the film."

Following its gala premiere in Budapest on Sept. 5 and general release across Hungary, *Freedom's Fury* will be screened in London, Munich and Washington, D.C., in government-sponsored screenings marking the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the revolution on Oct. 23.

The film will also be released in select cities in the United States in a bid to qualify for an Oscar run.

Ms. Raney Aarons and Mr. Gray spent two months filming in Hungary and made several other research visits to the country. They were granted unprecedented access to secret police archives and film footage.

"We've been told by Hungarians that we've done a good job at handling a difficult and still highly politicized subject. As non-Hungarians, we've been able to take a more objective view of the painful events."

The film artfully blends archival footage with recent interviews and modern water polo footage shot in Hungary and California. The Hungarian ministry of defence has awarded the Hungarian Medal of Honour to the siblings and their

came to flee the country.

About 38,000 Hungarians came to Canada, and Hungary was sealed behind the communist Iron Curtain.

*Freedom's Fury*, narrated by American seven-time Olympic medal-winning swimmer Mark Spitz, counts Quentin Tarantino, director of *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*, and *Charlie's Angels'* Lucy Liu among its executive directors.

Ms. Liu is a friend from Mr. Gray's university days and has been very hands-on in the making and editing of the film.

"She's been a great support," Mr. Gray said. "And we even ended up doing some of the editing in her

Hungarian Medal of Honour to the siblings and their partners in WOLO Entertainment for shining the spotlight on this moment in history.

*Freedom's Fury* was to be shown at Lisgar Collegiate this morning before a gala screening and fundraiser — hosted by Carolyn Waldo in aid of the Canada-Hungary Educational Foundation and Water Polo Canada — at the National Gallery tonight at 8 p.m.

Mr. Gray, Ms. Raney Aarons and Ervin Zador will be present.

Tickets are available by contacting Judy Young Drache at 613-567-5756 or at Pure Gelato on Elgin Street.