

Screenscope, Inc.

Making Movies and Dodging Bombs

By Cindy Rich
The Washingtonian

Hollywood couples could learn something from Hal and Marilyn Weiner. For 34 years, they have lived and made films together: He writes, she produces, they share the directing.

Since starting their company in 1969, the Weiners have made more than 225 documentaries, three feature films, and four public-TV series. Their latest is “Journey to Planet Earth,” about the relationship between the environment and national security, politics, and world health. On the Brink, the first of the three episodes, narrated by Matt Damon, airs March 26.

In their travels to more than 35 countries, including Haiti, Kenya, China, Argentina, and Uzbekistan, the Weiners have stayed in homes without bathrooms and hotels with armed guards. They've had their share of food poisoning and almost been thrown in jail. “It's a daily adventure,” Hal says.

While shooting “Journey to Planet Earth,” they'd chosen a location near a New Year's party in Bangladesh when Marilyn told the crew she wanted everyone to leave; “it was a sixth sense.” Minutes later two pipe bombs exploded where they'd been standing, killing ten.

Hal and Marilyn are part of a Washington community of filmmakers. They grew up five blocks apart in Brooklyn, met after college, married in 1968, and came here a year later when Hal landed a production contract with Head Start.

Marilyn had taught French and was contemplating law school: “I didn't realize Washington did not need another lawyer.” She started working with Hal and soon became partner. They've won 130 film-festival awards and two Emmys.

They like using Washington as a backdrop: They shot their NBC documentary “Streets of Sorrow” in Anacostia and “The Imagemaker,” a 1986 drama about media and political corruption, all over DC. Hal is now writing a murder-mystery screenplay set in DC.

Other projects include a history-of-basketball series with Jane Leavy (whose Sandy Koufax book is a bestseller), a documentary on Betty Friedan, and Decker, about CIA involvement in the drug trade.

They spent four months in Los Angeles in preproduction on “K2,” a 1992 Paramount film about mountain climbing, but never considered a move west.

“This is an easier place to live,” says Marilyn. “You can have friends that do something else besides make movies.”

