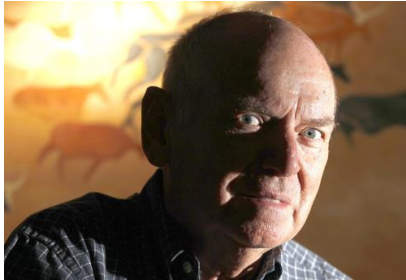


Trout Valley man tells of brother's heroics during Rape of Nanking

Chinese filmmakers interviewed man for 10-part documentary series



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TROUT VALLEY – Although Sonya Sindberg had heard her grandfather tell this same story of his half-brother over and over, she didn't mind spending a September Saturday in his basement listening to it once again.

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This time, cameras were rolling as Ole Sindberg, 81, sat with his grandchildren, telling tales of his half-brother, Bernhard, and his life-saving actions in Nanking, China, during the brutal occupation by Japanese forces known as the Rape of Nanking in the late 1930s.

"It's hard to hear a story like that and have it not have a big impact on you because there's so much that happened – so many wonderful things that happened, and so many horrible things that happened," Sonya Sindberg said.

Bernhard Sindberg, who died in 1983, is regarded as a hero by the Chinese government for sheltering thousands of innocent Chinese citizens in a Danish-owned cement factory throughout the worst of the massacre in 1937 and 1938.

The Chinese government estimates 300,000 people died in the first six weeks of the occupation, and Sindberg may have saved as many as 20,000 lives, although estimates vary greatly.

The story, which Sonya Sindberg said long has been a part of family lore, is being documented by a crew from the China Jiangsu Broadcasting Corp. The documentary will be part of a 10-part series dedicated to the heroes of that massacre.

Ming Liu, the director of the documentary, said Sindberg is one of the lesser-known heroes from the episode. To find out more about him, she reached out to Ole Sindberg, a native Dane and current Trout Valley resident.

“The way they see it, I’m one of the very few people that had regular contact with my brother during his lifetime,” Ole said. “I’m of that same generation. It’s a bit of a stretch, because he’s 23 years older than me, but we do have the same father, so they came.”

That contact didn’t actually start until Ole was an adult and he happened to cross paths with his brother when they were working in British Columbia, Canada, in 1962.

When they met for dinner in Vancouver and retreated to Ole’s hotel room, Bernhard told stories that lasted into the night, some of which Ole said sounded like “sailor’s yarn.”

“After a while,” Ole said, “I just wanted to go to bed.”

The two stayed in touch, and over time, Ole realized the stories were true. His half-brother made a number of stops after leaving Denmark as a teen – joining and deserting the French Foreign Legion, getting thrown into the brig of a ship traveling from the U.S. to China, selling motorcycles and machine guns – but his heroics began in 1937, when a Danish company put him in charge of a cement factory in Nanking, where civilians were being brutally murdered and abused by Japanese soldiers