Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald had its Michigan film premiere in MSU’s Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center Auditorium.
Kinderblock 66 chronicles the memories, stories and return to Buchenwald of Kinderblock 66 survivors and Buchenwald Boys Naftali-Duro Furst, Pavel Kohn, Israel-Laszlo Lazar, and Alex Moskovic. Alex’s son, Steven Moskovic, is the film’s executive producer. Kenneth Waltzer, director of the MSU Jewish Studies Program, served as the film’s historical consultant.

Following the Kellogg Center screening, Alex and Steve Moskovic answered audience questions for more than an hour.

THE BACKGROUND
The Buchenwald concentration camp, located near Weimar, Germany, was a central camp in the Nazi slave labor empire, and prisoners were brought to it from camps throughout the Nazi system. Transports arrived at Buchenwald from Auschwitz in spring and summer 1944, and, in early 1945, the Nazis forced tens of thousands of Jewish prisoners westward on death marches. Untold thousands of prisoners died, shot by guards along the roads or frozen in open cattle cars. The survivors were then forced into new camps where chances of survival were limited as prisoners were forced to perform harsh labor, given starvation rations, and subjected to terror and wanton brutality.

Established in 1937, Buchenwald was one of the largest and most well-known German concentration camps. Early in its history, there had been Jewish prisoners at Buchenwald, but most had been killed or sent to Auschwitz to die in 1942. Now, in 1944, the Jewish population of Buchenwald rose again as the camp was flooded with some of the remnants of decimated European Jewry.

Included in this influx of Jewish prisoners were a large number of boys, many between the ages of 12 and 16. These boys had come from all over Europe and had already undergone unimaginable horrors: ghettoization, transports, brutalizations, privations, starvation and often the loss of their families. By the time they arrived in Buchenwald, they were already hardened veterans of the camps, having learned how to survive under the most inhuman conditions.
As the Allied forces closed in during the war’s frantic final days in early April 1945, the Nazis decided to eradicate Buchenwald’s Jews. The camp’s commanders ordered all Jews to report for assembly; they were to be forced out on more death marches. Kalina refused to comply with this order. He commanded the boys not to report to the assembly and changed the religion on their badges—the Jewish boys were now listed as Christians—so that when the SS came around looking for Jews, Kalina told them that block 66 had no more.

When the Allies liberated Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, over 900 Jewish boys survived. When they were freed, the boys lifted up Antonin Kalina and carried him on their shoulders.

On April 11, 2010, 65 years later, several of the surviving boys from block 66, including Naftali-Duro Furst, Pavel Kohn, Israel-Laszlo Lazar, and Alex Moskovic, returned to Weimar and to Buchenwald.

*Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald* is their story.

The screening of *Kinderblock 66* attracted a lively, interested audience to the Kellogg Center Auditorium where “Buchenwald Boy” Alex Moscovic answered engaged attendees’ post-screening questions about his experiences in the Nazi concentration camp.

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The German Communist-led underground at Buchenwald that administered the camp on a day-to-day basis recognized this influx of children and youths as requiring a special response. The underground made a conscious decision to do what it could to protect the youths. The children were coming in such numbers that leaders in the clandestine conspiracy decided to create a special block for them, and locate the boys far away from the main part of Buchenwald, deep in the filthy quarantine area where the SS was loath to go.

This barrack, number 66 in the “little camp,” became known as the “kinderblock,” or children’s block. Antonin Kalina was the block elder. In this capacity, Kalina went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the survival of the boys he placed there. Unlike the other prisoners in Buchenwald, the boys of block 66 did not have to leave their barracks for roll call—instead of assembling with the rest of the camp twice a day no matter the conditions outside, the boys were counted inside. Also, unlike the other prisoners, the boys of 66 did not go to work. Remaining inside was a tremendous advantage for the boys and a factor that certainly helped keep many of them alive. Conditions within the block were also better than in other parts of the camp—the boys had access to blankets, and, at times, to extra food rations.

Significantly, the block elders didn’t beat the boys, something almost unheard of within the Nazi camp system. Let there be no misunderstanding: Despite the relative advantages, this was still a concentration camp full of fear, disease, hunger and death. But Kalina did what he could to mitigate this reality for the boys of Kinderblock 66, often at great personal risk.