In 1941, it was almost impossible to escape the horrors of Hitler’s regime. This was the year when fourteen year-old Marion Finkels joined the thousands of Jewish refugees desperate to flee Nazi-Occupied Europe. With her family, she escaped by ship across the Atlantic Ocean to one of the few countries open to them: Cuba.

In Forgotten Jewels, A Haven in Havana, Marion and other survivors reveal a little-known story in Jewish-Cuban history where diamonds become the currency that sustains them and merges two distinctly different cultures. On this small island, the refugees initiate a diamond polishing industry and build it to rapid success. Marion foregoes school and works as a diamond polisher to help support her family. In the factories, women work beside men, Jews beside Cubans. Refugee children grow up safe in a world far from war-ravaged Europe, but they are still marginalized.

When WWII ends, most of the refugees leave Cuba, returning to Europe or migrating to the U.S., and the Cuban diamond industry disappears almost without a trace. Yet its influence trickles down through current generations.

Filmmakers Judy Kreith and Robin Truesdale merge interviews, photos, passages from a memoir, and a teen’s diary to illustrate this story of perseverance. It reveals a fusion of cultures and customs with rhythm and fluidity as the refugees navigate their new lives influenced by the lifestyle and motion of Cuba.

Enrollment is limited. To reserve your seat, call (951) 827-4105 or (760) 834-0997 or go to www.extension.ucr.edu.