

Jewish Film Festival previews

UNUSUAL IN EVERY WAY to cap off upcoming International Jewish Film Festival

Sunday, May 29 2:00 pm
 Documentary | 2021 | Canada |
 Directors: Don Barnard and Yolanda
 Papini-Pollock | English | 63 min.
Review By BERNIE BELLAN

In January of this year Myron Love wrote about a new film that has been produced by local filmmaker Yolanda Papini-Pollock, titled “Unusual in Every Way”.

As Myron noted in that article, the film tells “the story of the unlikely friendship between Don Barnard, an individual of Indigenous background living with disabilities and post traumatic stress, and Solly Dreman, a former Winnipegger who made aliyah almost 60 years ago and is a retired Ben Gurion University Professor of Psychology.”

“Unusual in Every Way” will be the final film shown at the upcoming International Jewish Film Festival, on Sunday May 29, at 2:00 pm, in the Berney Theatre. (As with all the films to be shown this year, viewers will have the choice of attending in person or streaming the films on a computer or mobile device.)

I had the opportunity to view the film in advance. Although I have seen other of Yolanda’s films, I told her in an email that I was more than impressed with her latest production, as it marked a new sophistication in her documentary story telling style.

Through fast cutting, clever and imaginative graphics, some outstanding historical footage interspersed throughout the film, and some very insightful interviews with a range of subjects, “Unusual in Every Way” both tells the story of Don Barnard’s personal struggles and how his own story parallels the Jewish story of survival.

Although Don has an exceedingly high IQ (of 163), he has struggled with various challenges throughout his life, as the film makes exceedingly – and



UNUSUAL IN EVERY WAY is the finest work yet by local documentary filmmaker Yolanda Papini-Pollock. It tells the story of the relationship between a Manitoba Indigenous man, Don Barnard, and the Israeli couple that befriended him, Solly and Orly Dreman.

quite painfully, clear. He has been diagnosed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder he reveals in the film, and his father was a violent alcoholic. (Don’s father actually appears in the film, and in one scene that can be difficult to watch, Don tells him about the often violent, alcohol-fuelled outbursts Don was forced to endure as a child. His father though, admits he has no recollection at all of any of those incidents.)

As Myron also notes in his story about the film, Yolanda first met Don when they worked together on a documentary about different genocides that have occurred in recent history. (Don is an accomplished videographer in his own right.)

Later, Yolanda introduced Don to Solly and Orly Dreman in 2016 when they were in Winnipeg for a visit. (Solly had asked Yolanda whether she knew anyone who could video a lecture Solly was going to be giving, along with a family reunion he was planning on having.)

Again, as Myron notes in his story, the “Dremans and Barnard hit it off and the Israeli couple invited him to come to Israel at their expense. It happens that among Solly Dreman’s post-retirement activities has been helping youth with severe learning disorders.

“In 2020, thanks to the Dremans’ generosity, Barnard was able to realize his long-time dream of visiting Israel. He stayed with his hosts in Jerusalem for a week and toured the country with Orly’s son, Oren Cytto, as his tour guide.

“Solly Dreman also bought his Canadian guest a professional level video camera.”

(Continued on page 23. See “Unusual.”)

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“Unusual”

(Continued from page 22.)

Scenes from that visit form a good part of this film. Yet, not only did Solly and Orly open up their home to Don, they also introduced him to many of their friends, many of whom had also suffered their own personal traumas, having survived the Holocaust.

As Don learns more about Israel and the experiences of many of the individuals he encounters there, he begins to become aware just how similar the Jewish and Indigenous experience is in so many respects.

After viewing the film, I was curious about many aspects of how it was put together, so I asked Yolanda some questions about how the film was produced.

I asked her, for instance, when the scenes in Israel were actually filmed – and who did the filming there?

She answered: “Most of the filming was done by Don. He was there twice (2017 and 2020) and some was done by Omer Armoni.

I told Yolanda that I was very impressed with the historical footage she assembled. For instance, there are some fascinating scenes of Native children in residential schools, also of Holocaust survivors arriving in Israel. The parallels that Yolanda draws are quite insightful, I told her.

I also said to Yolanda that this particular film “seems to be by far your most ambitious project to date. Would you agree? The amount of editing it would have required would have been enormous.”

Tuesday, May 24, 7:00 pm

Israel | 2021 | Director: Yoav Brill | Hebrew and Swedish with English subtitles and in English | 80 minutes

Review by BERNIE BELLAN

It’s always quite interesting seeing how documentary filmmakers piece together footage from years past into a pastiche that lends support to an overall point they are trying to make.

Here we have a film about young volunteers who headed to Israel, beginning in the 1960s, and which turned into a headlong rush following the Six-Day War, but for some reason the filmmakers have chosen to concentrate almost entirely upon volunteers who came from Europe, especially from Germany and Scandinavia.

The film provides ample evidence that many kibbutz volunteers did come from countries such as Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, but there were also many young Canadian and American Jews who volunteered on kibbutzim (myself included).

If you were to believe everything that “Apples and Oranges” tells you about volunteers, you would think that it was all “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.” Maybe it was – and maybe it wasn’t, but speaking from my own experience as a kibbutz volunteer, it wasn’t all fun and games. (I was on a kibbutz where very few of the other volunteers spoke English; they were mostly French, and that made it quite difficult to integrate with them.)

Still, “Apples and Oranges” does offer some very interesting insights into what led so many young people to flock to Israel in the 60s and 70s, then to stop going following the first Intifada, in 1982. Israel was a largely unknown quantity in the 1960s for most young people, as the film explains. The idea of going to a country that had lots of sunshine and where you could be fed and given a place to sleep in return for four months of volunteer effort certainly caught the fancy of many young people.

But, watching this film, which is generally shot from the perspective of the foreigners who came to Israel, one can be forgiven for wondering whether another film might have portrayed Israelis in a more favourable light.

The notion that kibbutzim exploited the volunteers for cheap labour is repeated throughout this film, but really, what more would you have expected? Here you have droves of young people arriving in a foreign land, looking for an “experience” – and they’re all given a place to stay. What other country can be said to have welcomed anyone who arrived on its doorstep with nothing more than a backpack and a total lack of knowledge about the country in which they had just set foot?

“Apples and Oranges” does trace the stories of various individuals though, from the time they served as kibbutz volunteers to where they are today. The picture that accompanies this review shows someone who appears to be an aged hippie with a backpack.

His name, it turns out, is “Paul.” He’s one of the more interesting characters in the film, as there is quite a bit of footage of him as a young man, including his time spent in a band made up entirely of foreign guys that toured Israel and which was regularly featured on Israeli TV. It turns out that Paul ended up coming back to Israel, which is where he now lives, although he still seems to be just an old hippie who likes to fashion amusing musical instruments (similar to Al Simmonds).

What I found glossed over so completely in this film moreover is the effect that Israel’s having been on a war footing of one sort or another for all of its existence has had on kibbutz life. In 1973, for instance, it was

She responded: “Thank you. I did work hard on it and it is my favorite so far because the topic is close to my heart on many levels.”

And yet, while “Unusual in Every Way” seems to be pointing to a fairly happy ending, what with Don Barnard finding so much acceptance within Solly and Orly’s family, again, as Myron notes in his story, “Papini Pollock reports that overcoming trauma is not a simple process and Barnard’s personal recovery may take a long time. Despite being inspired by the stories he heard in Israel, his personal journey to healing is a roller coaster. As he says near the end of the documentary, he has his good days and his bad days – and he never knows when his disabilities will cause him to have a meltdown.”

Yet, despite Don Barnard’s struggles, which are often laid bare for all to see during the course of this film, Yolanda told me that “Don is much better. In fact, I really see a new drive in him and he is stronger than ever. I hope this continues.”

Thus, the hope engendered by the warm relationship that the film depicts between Solly and Orly Dreman on the one hand, and Don Barnard, on the other, does seem to have imbued Don Barnard with a newfound vitality, despite the bleak shadow often cast over him. In that sense, this film can serve as an inspiration for anyone who has had to deal with similar challenges that can often seem quite overpowering.

APPLES AND ORANGES



“Paul” is one of the more interesting characters in “Apples & Oranges”. An aging hippie, he first came to Israel in the 1960s when he certainly experienced his dream of enjoying “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.” Surprisingly enough, he has made Israel his permanent home.

through the efforts of volunteers that kibbutzim were able to continue functioning. For instance, my good friend Denzil Feinberg, who had arrived in Israel from South Africa shortly before the Yom Kippur War, has a fascinating story to tell of being handed major responsibilities for running Kibbutz Ma’agan Michael during the war while he was a volunteer there. After watching “Apples and Oranges,” it’s hard to imagine the volunteers shown in that film being entrusted with running a kibbutz.

Still, “Apples and Oranges” is quite an enjoyable – and often amusing romp, as we see footage of volunteers slopping around in the mud, partying, throwing watermelons into a truck, and so on. Did all those energetic – and often very good looking predominately young European boys and girls have much of an effect on their Israeli hosts in the end? The film would seem to be saying they did, to the extent that many young Israelis were in awe of those foreigners.

Ultimately though, the kibbutzim transformed from socialist fantasies into engines of capitalism. I realize the filmmakers weren’t interested in delving into the economic evolution of the kibbutz movement, but I wonder to what extent the

disappearance of the cheap labour provided by all those volunteers who stopped coming to Israel in the 1980s might have been a major contributing factor in the process of kibbutzim switching away from relying upon manual labour, first to machines, and eventually to high tech.

Perhaps that might not have been as interesting a subject matter as watching young people engaging in a vast social experiment for a time – often wearing very little clothing, by the way, but in terms of analyzing what effect the rapid rise and equally rapid decline in the number of volunteers had on the kibbutz movement, it would probably be a study equally as compelling as pondering whether Germans, Danes, and Swedes can outdrink members of any other nation.

Two arrested in connection with Elad terror attack

(May 8, 2022 / JNS) Israeli security forces have captured two suspects in connection with the deadly axe attack in Elad last week, according to a joint statement on Sunday by the Israel Police, Israel Defense Forces and Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet).

As’ad Yousef As’ad al-Rifa’i, 19, and Subhi Emad Subhi Abu Shqeir, 20, from the Palestinian village of Rumana near Jenin, were captured in a forest near Elad following a 60-hour manhunt, according to police. Channel 13 released video footage of the arrest.

After an initial medical check, the terrorists were transferred to the Shin Bet for questioning.

One of the suspects, the report said, left a will declaring his intention to murder and die “for Al Aqsa.”

Security forces broadened the hunt for the terrorists over the weekend, with police saying on Saturday that special forces and “advanced technological means, including various aircraft,” had been brought in to assist.

“Police helicopters and operational multirotor drones are scanning and broadcasting in real-time from the ground to the joint command post set up by the police’s Central District,” said police. The aircraft and drones directed units on the ground to any suspicious figures detected, the statement added.