

JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL SHINES LIGHT ON STORIES, STRUGGLES IN JUDAISM

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I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT I AM FORTUNATE TO HAVE GROWN UP JEWISH IN AMERICA, WHERE I HAVE FOUND GOOD COMPANY AND CAMARADERIE WITH MY FELLOW JEWS AS WELL AS ACCEPTANCE BY MY NON-JEWISH PEERS, AND THUS I HAVE MORE OR LESS BEEN INSULATED FROM THE MANY CHALLENGES FACED BY JEWS THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

But after spending even just a few hours watching some of the movies that were presented at the second annual Jewish Film Festival in Lewes this past March, as well as chatting with some of the filmgoers, I suddenly got a powerful sense of those challenges as well as the complicated history of modern Judaism.

"For me, it's a way of reconnecting with the Jewish community," Peter Zoll, 74, a resident of Millsboro and retiree from the banking industry, said of the Film Festival. "These are all films with more or less the same themes of Judaism in different places, so I just find it very interesting the different takes that people have on Jews and the Jewish faith in general."

These diverse perspectives were very apparent in the two films I attended, *The People Vs. Fritz Bauer* and *Keep Quiet*.

The People Vs. Fritz Bauer is set in 1957, 12 years after the end of WWII, and centers around the story of Dr. Fritz Bauer, an attorney general in Frankfurt who has been working tirelessly to find the infamous Nazi lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann and has received a crucial tip on the former Holocaust organizer's possible whereabouts.

Obsessed with justice and frustrated by the glacial pace of his own nation's officials' efforts to punish Nazi criminals (many of whom are former Nazis themselves and whom Dr. Bauer fears will only warn Eichmann of his efforts), Dr. Bauer instead seeks the aid of the Israeli secret police force (Mossad) in Eichmann's capture, which at the time was considered a treasonous act in West Germany.

Eichmann, as some may know and as the film depicts, was eventually captured in Argentina and sent to Israel, but Israeli authorities refused to extradite him to West Germany, much to Dr. Bauer's dismay (Eichmann was tried, convicted, and executed in Israel in 1962; Dr. Bauer's role in Eichmann's capture wasn't even revealed until years after it happened).

The other film I saw, *Keep Quiet*, was another eye-opener. It's a documentary that follows the career of former Holocaust denier Csanad Szegedi, who in the early 2000s was a rising star in Jobbik, an extreme right-wing political party in Hungary, only to discover that his mother's family was Jewish (and his grandmother an Auschwitz survivor), forcing him to leave his party and instead come to terms with his Jewish roots. It is a haunting yet revealing tale of just how extraordinarily difficult such a transition can be.

On the surface, both of these personal journeys couldn't be more different. And yet the struggles of both Fritz Bauer and Csanad Szegedi nonetheless seem to be against a common opponent, that being a historical and societal reluctance—if not resistance—to confront the sins of the past

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as well as their respective political climates. In Dr. Bauer's case, the sins are those of his fellow countrymen; in Szegedi's case, they're his own.

Both films were shown before nearly packed crowds at the Cinema Art Theatre in Lewes and were among several motion pictures shown that originated from 11 different countries. The mission of the festival, according to its joint presenters the Rehoboth Beach Film Society and Seaside Jewish Community, was to "deepen awareness of Jewish cultures and experiences and to explore community differences and commonalities through the art of film." Each of the films were preceded

by brief introductions from their respective sponsors and followed by discussions among the filmgoers led by the sponsors.

Watching these two films, despite the protagonists' respective journeys being separated by essentially two generations' time, there seemed to be a poignant, chilling symmetry between Dr. Bauer's quest for justice and Szegedi's struggle to transition from rabid anti-Semite to sympathetic Jew. Either way, the Film Festival serves as a stark reminder of and a spotlight shown directly on the obstacles and struggles that Jewish people have faced and continue to face in their path toward being understood, accepted, and—~~one might hope~~—appreciated by the rest of the world.

"Every one of these films brings something to reflect on," said Linda Blumner of Lewes,

72, a retired investigator for US Department of Labor and Civil Rights, who noted that the festival's content speaks to her as a Jew as well as a career civil rights advocate.

Judy Stormer, a retired Department of Defense employee from Lewes whose ancestors fled Austria before the Holocaust, offered this perspective on the festival, which she attended with her husband Joe. "It's important to us because the Holocaust is important," she said. "Future generations aren't really going to know anything about it, and I think movies like [*The People Vs. Fritz Bauer*] are fabulous, because they shed light on it," she said. "It's also very uplifting in a sense, as sad as it is, as horrible as it was, you get to see something good come out of something bad in some of the movies."