

INVENTING OUR LIFE

THE KIBBUTZ EXPERIMENT

A film by
Toby Perl Freilich

80 minutes, digital, English & Hebrew w/English subtitles, 2011, documentary



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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"*Inventing Our Life* examines the kibbutz movement as a key thread within the greater tapestry of the history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. It speaks with an intimacy that strikes an emotional chord in the viewer; I challenge any viewer not to be moved by this fine, fine work of documentary art." – David Leach, University of Victoria

Synopsis

Set against the backdrop of its glorious 100-year history, *Inventing Our Life* reveals the heartbreak and hope of Israel's modern kibbutz movement as a new generation struggles to ensure its survival. Can a radically socialist institution survive a new capitalist reality? How will painful reforms affect those who still believe in the kibbutz experiment, and continue to call it home?

Through the lens of its communal movement, director Toby Perl Freilich explores the modern history of Israel, from its revolutionary settlers to the political upheaval that shook the socialist foundations of the state. We meet first, second and third generation members from kibbutzim like Degania, the flagship commune established in 1909; Hulda, once near collapse and recently privatized; and Sasa, the first to be settled entirely by Americans and today Israel's wealthiest kibbutz.

With their desire to create a Jewish homeland and build a more just society, the first settlers helped place kibbutzim in the vanguard of Israeli history. In doing so, they became a magnet for all those who shared one thing in common - a powerful urge to invent their own life.

Director's Statement

Inventing Our Life: The Kibbutz Experiment has its roots in my own biography. In 1968, my sister, then 18, moved to Israel and settled on a kibbutz. My parents were horrified. Polish-born Holocaust survivors who'd immigrated to America after the war, they saw kibbutz as nothing more than a glorified kolkhoz, one of Stalin's failed collective farms. It was a prison camp in the guise of a commune. They couldn't understand why my sister would chuck the American dream in favor of something that smacked so much of Soviet oppression and limited opportunity.

I was surprised, then, when visiting my sister as a kid in the 1970s, to discover that her kibbutz more closely resembled a lush Israeli suburb than the impoverished collective I had been led to imagine. Food, electricity, health care, education—everything was free and liberally doled out. Communal life could be maddeningly close, but it was vibrant and thrummed with the energy of a shared enterprise.

As the years passed, the waste and inefficiency of a moneyless society gradually began to take their toll on Israel's roughly 270 kibbutzim. Financial and social hurdles arose to challenge each one of the kibbutzim's cherished emblems, from communal child rearing to the joint dining hall.

Hit hard by a severe economic crisis in the 1980s and threatened by the arrant defection of its third generation, strict egalitarianism and doctrinaire socialism became luxuries few kibbutzim could continue to afford. For the past 20 years, many kibbutzim have teetered on the brink of collapse, and the movement itself battles obsolescence.

But spending time on several kibbutzim, and interviewing scores of current and former members, I found a movement in flux, questioning old pieties and testing out new ones. Though still passionately committed to social justice, the next generation is transforming the kibbutz movement, making it once again relevant to Israel's capitalistic society while struggling with a wide range of challenges, new and old.

– **Toby Perl Freilich, adapted and reprinted from *Tablet Magazine***

Filmmaker Bios

Toby Perl Freilich, Director, Producer, Writer

A freelance film producer and writer, Toby Perl Freilich co-produced and wrote the documentary film, *SECRET LIVES: Hidden Children & Their Rescuers*, selected by Andrew Sarris as one of the ten best non-fiction films of 2003, and featured on HBO/Cinemax. The film also won a Christopher Award for “affirming the highest values of the human spirit.” Freilich was nominated for a news and documentary Emmy in the category of Outstanding Achievement in a Craft: Writing, and *SECRET LIVES* was nominated in the category of Outstanding Historical Programming. She was also co-producer of the Emmy-nominated *RESISTANCE: Untold Stories of Jewish Partisans*, an independent PBS documentary that was broadcast nationally in April 2002. Freilich is a contributing writer to the *Forward* and *Tablet* magazine.

Juliet Weber, Editor

Juliet Weber has been a documentary editor for over 20 years. Recent credits include *Good Ol' Charles Schulz* for PBS/American Masters; *Mr. Conservative: Goldwater on Goldwater* for HBO; and the independent documentary *A Jihad for Love*. Other credits include *A Rape In a Small Town*, *The Florence Holway Story*, (Emmy Nominee for editing); *Sister Helen*, (Sundance Directing Award 2002); *Diary Of a Political Tourist*; *Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives*; *Fastpitch*, (Best documentary, Nashville Independent Film Festival); *The Restless Conscience* (Academy Award Nominee, feature documentary), *Daughter of the Bride*, (Academy Award Nominee, documentary short); and *Lindbergh* for PBS/The American Experience. Born in Sheffield, England but raised in the corn fields of Illinois, she now lives and works in New York City.

Itamar Hardar, Director of Photography

Educated at the London Film School in the 1980s, Itamar Hardar has a reputation as one of Israel's leading cinematographers, with a long history of D.P. credits on major Israeli feature films and theatrical and broadcast documentaries. Fluent in English, Hardar has also worked for CBS, ZDF, Antenne 2, the BBC and other major networks in the U.S. and Europe. A selection of recent credits includes 2nd Camera Operator on *Hello, Goodbye*, a French film starring Gerard Depardieu & Fanny Ardant; *First Arab Israeli Plane Hijacking*, a CBS Documentary; *Storm of Emotions*, a documentary about the Israeli evacuation from the Gaza Strip, short-listed for an Oscar nomination in 2006; *Suicide*, a documentary about female Palestinian suicide bombers, produced for France's Canal +; *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers*, directed by Academy Award-winner Aviva Slesin, nominated for 2 Emmys; and *East Wind*, a documentary describing the immigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel. Hardar is also a regular D.P. for Israeli feature director Dan Wollman, whose films have captured top prizes at the Jerusalem and Palm Beach Film Festivals.

Credits

Director, Producer & Writer

Toby Perl Freilich

Editor

Juliet Weber

Director of Photography

Itamar Hadar

Narrator

Tracy Thorne

Sound Recording

Danny Shaiovich, Ricardo Levy, Eli Taragan, Yoav Damti

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ARTV Communications Ltd, Israel

On-Line Editor

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Eran Oron

Graphic Design

Yossi Dahan, Twist Animation

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Toby Perl Freilich

Permission Clearance

Project Consultant

Joseph Dorman

Music Editing & Additional Music by

Mitch Clyman, Muso Productions

Casting Director

Sue Crystal

Music, Original Song Composed by

Beit Habubot

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For Noa and in loving memory of Anna and Isak Freilich