

MFA STUDENT, FILM, ISRAEL

On the night of February 27, 1985, Nachman Ariel entered the house he built for his 36-year-old son, Danny and his daughter-in-law, Esther. In his hand he carried the shotgun he used to protect himself from terrorists. He had built the house with his own hands so that Danny, who had been diagnosed with Down's Syndrome, leaving him at a fifth grade level of comprehension, would be close to him. At 69 years of age, Ariel shot his two children in their bed and then turned the gun on himself, taking his own life.

Fifty-three years earlier Ariel had left his home in Brooklyn, New York for a plot of land he had purchased in Palestine nestled along the coast just north of Tel Aviv. Ariel planned to build a new society and live the dream that was capturing young Jews throughout the world. With two other families Ariel built a *moshav* (or communal village) whose members would divide the labor and share the profits. It was a place of equality, a place of liberty, a place where the slogan of living was, "each according to his ability, everyone according to his need."

Soon those two families became ten and then twenty, until Moshav Beit Herut became one of the largest and most prosperous communities in Israel. As it grew Ariel sought to aid the Zionist cause. Soldiers, who would go on to fight the Arabs and the British, trained in his basement and backyard. Literature and posters were printed in the Moshav's silk-screen factory. Ariel was dedicated to building a country that mirrored his village community. He succeeded. Together, Beit Herut and Israel prospered as a new generation was born to carry on the dream.

Among this generation was Ariel's son, Danny. Although Danny was handicapped he wasn't sent to "special" villages for people like him. He stayed at Beit Herut, working in the fields and the factories. He was the said heir of Ariel and all the members of Beit Herut accepted him as a full member. "Each according to his ability, everyone according to his need."

Then Danny's life was cut short and one can't help but wonder whether the dream left with him for now Moshav Beit Herut is more akin to an American Suburb than to a communal village. Families pay to live in the beautiful houses so close to the seaside. Most of the businesses, once so active, now stand empty, as reminders of Israel's, "pioneer era." Many of the Moshav's third generation never knew Ariel and some don't know much about the Moshav because they left with their parents as children.

"Liberty Place," is an hour-long video documentary following the story of Moshav pioneer Nachman Ariel, tracing his dream of community and mourning his tragic downfall. Based on interviews I will conduct while in Israel the history of the Moshav will unfold. I will utilize archival material from the "pioneer era" and the *moshavim* movements to show the early years and the growth of the kibbutz. Personal photos and home movies of Moshav members will be interwoven with their stories recounting the Moshav's history. Contemporary footage will be used as the members discuss the change in the Moshav after Ariel died. I will also interview members of the Moshav who have left to find out about their experiences and what drove them to move away. The documentary will not search for answers as to why Ariel did what he did but instead use Ariel's story to investigate the need for community and how that unfolded within this village in this young country. Perhaps Ariel's act signified the end of communal living marking a natural process of maturity that was inevitable. Perhaps it signified the end of the dream for a better world. For each member it probably means something different. What will be significant is the ability to hear the reactions of three generations of Israelis and how these ideas of community and the individual are shifting and how they remain the same. It is important to do so now before the "pioneer" generation of Israelis dies off and while the generation "X" is still there. Many are looking to create yet another dream in Israel or abroad.

I first visited Moshav Beit Herut on the advice of my professor _____, while visiting Israel two summers ago. While there I met many of the members on the Moshav. Since then I have established a number of contacts in Israel that have agreed to assist in various phases of the project. _____ at Tel Aviv University has agreed to allow me access to the University's video equipment to screen and edit material. _____, director of Jerusalem's Film Archives has agreed to give me access to the largest collection of archival film material in Israel. _____, a member of Moshav Beit Herut will act as my entrance into the moshav where much interest has already been expressed in the documentary. Members are eager to tell their stories before the first generation members are all gone. Calls for family photos and films have already gone out within the village and material will be waiting upon my arrival.

For the past three years my work has focused on Judaism and Israel, looking at the complexities of being Jewish in America, and having a relationship to Israel and my cultural history. For me this project will be a significant part of that process. For the first time I will examine another American who dealt with these same issues by leaving America and trying to start a new society in Israel. It will allow others to see the common threads of culture between the two countries. While my work focuses on themes of Judaism I never make my work strictly for Jews. At a point in history where many groups are struggling to define themselves and understand their personal histories I am using my own as a point of departure. Once there the themes of community, society and the individual are meaningful to all, regardless of nationality or religion.

The amount of time it will take to complete production will be one academic year. I will leave in October for Tel Aviv University and set up a base from which to work. I will then go to the Moshav and spend time reacquainting myself with the members by participating in daily life, working in the factories and in the fields. At this point I will gather personal photos and films from members and shoot preliminary interviews. I will then go to Jerusalem to begin archival film research. Once this material is compiled and transferred to video I will return to the Moshav and conduct formal interviews with members. I will then conduct interviews with members no longer on the Moshav and gather current footage of Israel. I feel that this documentary will be a valuable project for me as a filmmaker and for its viewers.