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SECOND CITY TZIVI'S SNEAK PEEK
Coming Next Month in the Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema:

**FIVE
DAYS**



Special for Chicago Jewish Community Online
by Jan Lisa Huttner

Where were we exactly one year ago? Glued to our television screens watching the Gaza disengagement. Filmmaker Yoav Shamir captures the pain and the passion, the complexity and the conviction of that event in his masterful new documentary **FIVE DAYS**. A self-described "peacenik" with openly left-wing sympathies, Shamir would not have been my first choice for such a sensitive assignment. Although his 2003 doc **CHECKPOINT** won a slew of awards and was a candidate for the Israel Film Academy's "Best Documentary" prize, I found **CHECKPOINT** (which I saw at the 2004 Chicago International Film Festival) one-sided and over-simplified. The "fly on the wall" approach to capturing the essence of a situation with no explanation or voice-over narration turned into a poor excuse for heart-wrenching visuals presented without context or conscience.

So I went into **FIVE DAYS** a skeptic but I came out converted. In **FIVE DAYS**, Shamir embeds small camera teams within each group of participants, and then personally stitches the pieces of footage together into a comprehensive quilt. The narrative structure is set by the clock; from day one to day five, the agonizing minutes tick by until all of the resident families and protesting zealots are gone. In the end only the construction crews remain, as they slowly level the empty buildings.

The main protagonists are Major General Dan Harel, head of the IDF's Southern Command, and resistance leader Noam Shapira, a resident of the Shirat Ha'Yam settlement. Harel's job is to motivate, coach, and restrain 40,000 nervous men and women in uniform. Shapira's job is to rally the faithful through prayers and songs, and covertly mark out secret trails so that supporters can bypass the checkpoints and augment the ranks of the 8,000 residents. They play their parts in the full glare of the world press, and under the watchful eyes of Palestinian neighbors.

The tension is almost unbearable. Parents prepare young children for the arrival of soldiers in their intimate family spaces; teenagers congregate in synagogues and weep; young girls and old men plead with the soldiers; men of a comparable age, men who might well have been comrades during their own reserve assignments, try to bargain for another day or another hour. How can this not end in bloodshed, and yet it did not. It does not.

FIVE DAYS is documentary filmmaking at its very best, tackling a crucial subject with depth and sensitivity, providing audiences with both indelible imagery and analytic understanding. While nominated for a Grand Jury Prize at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival (where the film had its US premiere), FIVE DAYS has been otherwise overlooked, even by the Israel Film Academy. Given what's happened recently, however, awarding the 2005 Best Documentary prize to Dani Menkin's excruciatingly "uplifting" personal odyssey 39 POUNDS OF LOVE seems a bit like wishful thinking. When Shamir showed FIVE DAYS last year at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, he told the audience his experience gave him "hope with other kinds of political disputes." May those words of hope go from Shamir's lips to the ears of the Almighty.

The FIVE DAYS screening is scheduled for 5 PM on Wednesday September 13 at Chicago's Webster Place Theatre. [Click here for complete details](#) about this year's "Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema."

Tziviah bat Yisroel v'Hudah (Jan Lisa Huttner) writes the "Second City Tzivi Spotlight" on local arts & culture, a column which appears every month in the *JUF News*.

See our September issue for additional CFIC details including Tzivi's top picks. Send your comments and/or suggestions for future columns to Tzivi@msn.com.

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