

# 36th Annual Buffalo International Jewish Film Festival Screening Virtually Through May 14, 2021

This year the Buffalo International Jewish Film Festival celebrates its 36th Season. The Festival will stream films virtually through Thursday, May 14. "After successfully transitioning to a virtual format last year we are thrilled to continue presenting the Film Festival in a safe and easily accessible way for the Buffalo community and beyond," said Katie Wzontek, Cultural Arts Director, Jewish Community Center of Greater Buffalo. "

The Festival will host three virtual Talkback Tuesdays streamed on YouTube. Talkback Tuesday, April 27 features Ryan Porush, director of



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*The Passengers*, about Ethiopian Jews trying to emigrate to Israel. On May 4, the Talkback includes a panel discussion on *Shared Legacies*, the story of Black and Jewish collaboration during the Civil Rights movement. Moderated by Rabbi Adam Rosenbaum from Temple Beth Tzedek, panelists include Rabbi Everett Gendler, interviewed throughout the film, Rev Mark Blue, president of NAACP Buffalo Branch, and Rene Petties-Jones, president of the National Federation for Just Communities of WNY, Inc. The final Tuesday Talkback on May 11 features the French WWII film *An Irrepressible Woman*, and will be moderated by Dr. Eileen Angelini, an expert on Vichy France. The following films are included in the BIJFF screening schedule, through Friday, May 14, 2021:

## 2021 FILM FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

Through May 14, 2021 [www.bijff.com](http://www.bijff.com)

Tuesday, April 27 6:00 p.m. – Friday, April 30 6:00 p.m.  
*Syndrome K • Sublet*

Saturday, May 1 6:00 p.m. – Tuesday, May 4 6:00 p.m.  
*Shared Legacies*  
*Starry Sky Over A Roman Ghetto*

Tuesday, May 4 6:00 p.m. – Friday, May 7 6:00 p.m.  
*The Last Supper • Aulcie*

Saturday, May 8 6:00 p.m. – Tuesday, May 11 6:00 p.m.  
*An Irrepressible Woman • Bukra Fil Mish-Mish*

Tuesday, May 11 6:00 p.m. – Friday, May 14 6:00 p.m.  
*The Crossing • Incitement*

Multiple options for tickets are available including single tickets, flex passes or all access passes.

*Film synopses, trailers, ticket prices and streaming instructions available at [www.bijff.com](http://www.bijff.com).*

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Tuesday, April 27

7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday Talkback: *The Passengers* with Director Ryan Porush

Tuesday, May 4

7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday Talkback: *Shared Legacies* panel discussion

Tuesday, May 11

7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday Talkback: *An Irrepressible Woman* with Eileen Angelini

## Interview with a Jewish Civil Rights Activist: Rabbi Everett Gendler

BY GAIL GENDLER, DAUGHTER OF ALAN GENDLER (Z"l) AND CHARLOTTE GENDLER

**Shared Legacies: The African-American Jewish Civil Rights Alliance** is a documentary revisiting and reviving the crucial historic lessons of the Black-Jewish cooperation during the Civil Rights era. It is being virtually screened as part of the BIJFF with a talkback May 4 at 7:00 p.m. During the post film program, Rabbi Adam Rosenbaum of Temple Beth Tzedek will moderate a panel including noted civil rights era activist Rabbi Everett Gendler, who is featured in the film, NAACP's Rev. Mark Blue and President of the National Federation of Just Communities Rene Petties-Jones. We are pleased to share a recent interview with Rabbi Gendler by Buffalonian and family member Gail Gendler.

### When did you start working with the Civil Rights movement?

I started working at my first congregation in Princeton, NJ in 1962 (after graduating from Jewish Theological Seminary-JTS). A rabbi colleague phoned and said, "King (Rev. Martin Luther King) really hit some roadblocks in Albany (GA) and he's hoping that some Northern clergy can come participate in a prayer vigil. It might help boost the movement." Obviously, King's approach of non-violence, active, engaged, prophetic justice and, reliving the exodus from Egypt, had intrinsic appeal to me.

I realized that the timing for this sort of venture is never convenient. I asked the question 'Do you put your feet and body where your mouth has been, or do you take refuge in inconvenience?' I simply felt moved to risk, so I went.

While that (first) demonstration was postponed, I was able to sit in on the planning session. I saw (King) and his fellow organizers at



Rabbi Everett Gendler

work. Being in the room was very instructive.

The next year, during May 1963, I was in the Catskills with the Rabbinical Assembly (Conference). Nineteen rabbis at the Conference were delegated to go support activities in the South, to help Civil Rights efforts. I was one of the leaders of that delegation and stayed for two--three days. I returned to Princeton and stayed in touch with the movement. After the horror of bloody Sunday in Selma (March 7, 1965), Mary (my wife) and I returned to Selma for "Turnaround Tuesday," a second planned march that drew 2500 people.



Shared Legacies

### What was your relationship like with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel z"l?

Rabbi Heschel was one of my teachers at the Seminary (JTS). He was certainly an inspirational figure; he had a profound influence on me. I was fortunate enough to have contact with him throughout my studies at the Seminary and afterwards.

Historians mention that I persuaded Heschel to go to Selma for the famous, triumphant march. That should be qualified. There was no need to persuade him to go; he had a deep instinct, a deep identification with King and the freedom movement. He did ask me if I thought it was responsible, how much danger was there for him, as he and his wife, Sylvia had a young daughter.



I had a blessed amount of contact with Rabbi Heschel; I wish it had been more. In the same way, I wish I had more time with (King), but what contact I had was pretty close up.

Rev. King Jr. was the keynote speaker at the Rabbinical Assembly in March 1968, celebrating Rabbi Heschel's 60th birthday. I chaired a session asking (King) questions about Civil Rights. Ten days later Rev. King Jr. was assassinated. I was blessed to have a fair amount of contact with King. I was a faithful non-violent foot soldier. When needed, I would turn up.

**What can the Jewish community and their allies do to foster and include others in the struggle for civil rights today?**

For the astonishing progress that followed the Civil Rights movement, we (still) need the kind of vision that King provided. We need the shared values, the affirmation of the dignity of all human beings, the emphasis on **all** of us as Americans. We need to articulate that, not just through words but through engagement; we need to address them together. Our best chances for moving forward is to find commonality and not just trading favors for advancement for one group or another.

**What is needed to create more unity in Civil Rights work today?**

We need to engage in clarification of what our vision is... of the future. It is not clear at this point, at least not clear to me, exactly what various groups want.

The people who want to broaden our cultural sensitivities have a very important point and of course, other points of view have to be included. On what basis is there this inclusion? We recognize that our differences have to be acknowledged and celebrated. But let us also identify human elements that all of us share. We have more in common than divides us. We have to find a way to recognize that "distinctive" need not mean "divisiveness."



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