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Riverdale Y hosts opening of documentary

By ANNA JOSEPH

Amy Oppenheimer's documentary, "Faces of Israel," examines the concept of a Jewish democratic state through the context of marriage. The film recently premiered at the Riverdale YM-YWHA.

Oppenheimer first became interested in making a film in 2007 while spending a year in Haifa during college, though she had long been interested in issues of religion, coexistence, and democracy. With no previous film experience, she began making the film, learning along the way. "My ultimate goal was to get the word out. I went to Israel and my mind was opened to a complex culture of people who were passionate about the concept of a Jewish democratic state, but were grappling with what that actually meant," she said.

Oppenheimer edited the film after her return to Johns Hopkins University, and in late March, three years after starting the process, she showed "Faces of Israel" to a large and enthusiastic crowd at the Riverdale Y. The night began with the screening of the film and continued with a panel discussion on current Israeli issues, moderated by Rabbi Seth Farber and featuring Conservative Rabbi Julia Andelman, Orthodox Rabbi Yosef Blau, and Reform Rabbi Steven Burton.

The documentary was divided into segments, in which many Israelis with different backgrounds ranging from kibbutzniks to Orthodox rabbis answered questions related to the process of getting married in Israel. The first segment consisted of responses to the question, "What does it mean to be a Jewish state?" Later queries included the role of the chief rabbinate and questions about both

civil unions and same-sex marriages in Israel. "When I spoke with people, there's conversion and divorce, and those are really important topics, but people lit up when I spoke to them about marriage," Oppenheimer observed. "It's something that people get excited about, and sometimes angry about. And I was looking for a way to tie these somewhat abstract issues of religion and state and identity and Judaism to something very concrete that almost anybody can relate to...and marriage was that issue."

Although she grew up in Leonia, New Jersey, Oppenheimer now considers Riverdale home after living here for a year and a half with her husband, Yair Horowitz. She is very active in the community, running weekly programming for kids at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. Over the next few years, she hopes to show the film at many Jewish institutions across the country, from synagogues to Jewish summer camps.

"Riverdale is a model that I'm going to take around the country," Oppenheimer stated. "I think Riverdale is known for having a very strong, active, committed, thoughtful Jewish community. There's a very unique atmosphere here of people being able to come together and being able to work together and being committed to thinking about these issues. I know from speaking with people from other communities that this unity is something that they are striving for. The fact that we're able to bring just about every single Jewish organization, every single synagogue and temple together for an event that has both religious and political significance—that is something that I'm very happy about."