

Decades after his death, tourist's film makes history

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mark white hair against the backdrop of a lavender sunset; and, from Europe, men sweeping a crematory at Dachau Concentration Camp, incongruously surrounded by fields of bright green grass.

The story behind the documentary is a classic tale of Jewish geography. Some 10 years ago, Kfir was planning to launch a History Channel devoted to Israel. One of his backers was a former president of Technion University, Amos Horev. Horev told Kfir that one of the university's donors had hours of footage of Israel boxed up in his basement thousands of miles away in Newton, Mass.

That donor was Sonny Monosson, who had inherited the film from his father, Fred.

Family members told the *Advocate* that they knew Monosson had visited Israel countless times, but hadn't realized the significance of the film collection.

"I looked at one reel, and it was a goldmine," Kfir said.

While he eventually set aside plans for the history channel, the director, working with producer Itzhak Rubin, did set to work on the exacting process of editing and identifying Monosson's 16mm film and transferring it to DVD format.

Kfir recalled that when he first saw footage of people praying at the Western Wall, he assumed it was taken after the Six-Day War. But when he looked closer, he noticed men dressed in British uniforms and realized that it must pre-date the Jewish state.

"There are shots of 1948 in the war. You see people on the border of Tel Aviv eating ice cream and eating in restau-



Director Avishai Kfir edited down 40 hours of footage.

rants," Kfir said.

Those scenes reminded him of the Lebanon war, when he was surprised by how placid it was in Tel Aviv. "Life goes on, regardless," he said. "People try to live their daily lives, and that was really shocking for me. It was a war, but life goes on."

Kfir completed the documentary last year, too late for Sonny Monosson, who died in 2003.

The documentary includes a recap of Fred Monosson's life. He, his mother and four siblings moved to Boston from Russia in 1906. His father, a money changer in Moscow, had been killed by a drunken customer. Monosson eventually took a job in the garment industry, later becoming a labor leader. But he was to make his fortune in management as the owner of the Cosmopolitan Raincoat Manufacturing Company.

Shortly after World War II, he filmed in Europe. One scene shows a sign for a "hanging tree" at a concentration camp.

Monosson filmed Holocaust survivors at internment camps in Cyprus who had been tem-

porarily turned back by the British. He also captured scenes of Jews lucky enough to make it into Palestine, including one of himself dancing with newly arrived Yemenite Jews, their tallitot swinging.

Monosson was not just a passive recorder of events. He organized protests in Boston against the British government, used his raincoat factory as a base for collecting weapons to be used in the War of Independence and solicited donations for Israeli veterans.

In 1953 he established a community for airport workers, Neve Monosson. He invited David Ben-Gurion to the settlement, but the prime minister said he would come only after Monosson built a house in Israel. Monosson did just that, and welcomed Ben-Gurion as his honored guest at the housewarming party.

He donated money to kibbutzim such as the Kfar Truman settlement, named after President Harry Truman, and led the effort to build the Zionist Organization of America House in Tel Aviv. He filmed the ribbon cutting for the building, then surrounded by undeveloped greenery.

Back home, he screened his movies for family members. "It was just taking pictures because he liked taking pictures," said Sonny Monosson's widow, Gloria, who lives in Newton.

While she couldn't recall watching the films herself, she did remember the many Israeli guests her father-in-law hosted in Brookline – among them, Ben-Gurion.

She said Monosson was not particularly religious. Rather, he expressed his Judaism through his devotion to Israel, she said. "He was for the land and for the country."



From top: Monosson with Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem in 1949; a protest against the British Mandate in Boston in 1947; members of Kibbutz Dalia in 1947; and refugees at a Jewish internment camp in Cyprus who had been turned away from Palestine in 1947.



'Every person counts': Tikvah program marks 40th years

In 1970, when Camp Ramah New England launched its Tikvah program, children with special needs tended to be more of an afterthought in Jewish camping.

Last Sunday, as some 125 alumni, staffers and parents converged on the Palmer campgrounds to celebrate the program's 40th anniversary, Tikvah could boast that it has helped transform overnight camping nationwide for children who face such challenges as cognitive impairments, autism, and cerebral palsy.

"It is one community, and every person counts," said Betty Ross of Swampscott, whose 17-year-old daughter, Ilyse, has Down's syndrome and is spending her sixth summer in the Tikvah program. "She has such a Jewish heart, she loves Israeli dancing and singing, and it is a blessing for her to be here."

Tikvah campers are largely integrat-



PHOTO BY AVI FRIEDMAN

Former Tikvah camper Matthew Bander of Brighton with Emily Perlmutter, a friend of his at the Ramah Tikvah program.

ed into the main camp community, helping them feel more valued while enriching the experience of other campers.

"The founders of Tikvah" – New York educators Herb and Barbara Greenberg – "were truly pioneers, believing that special needs students and campers



PHOTO BY AVI FRIEDMAN

Former Tikvah staff members (from left) David Kieval of New York, Shira Arcus of Washington, D.C., and Anna Stanger of Boston.

should have the same and equal opportunities and exposures as everyone else," said Howard Blas, director of the Tikvah program at Camp Ramah New England. "Tikvah at camp is and should be as natural as having swimming, softball and Shabbat."

Nearly 2,000 special needs campers

have participated in Tikvah programs nationwide since its inception in New England. Some 50 Tikvah campers will be at Ramah New England this summer.

"Tikvah allows the community at large to put what we all talk about all the time – social and community justice and tikkun olam – into real action," said Rabbi Jim Rosen of Beth El Temple in Hartford, whose son has special needs and is a volunteer in the camp mailroom. "It says we value and honor our belief in human dignity, and enable everyone to have access to our tradition."

Ramah, which is associated with the Conservative movement, operates under the educational and religious guidance of the Jewish Theological Seminary.