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Inside the NYJFF: Recovering "Our Disappeared"

Lots of us are guilty of furtively googling exes. But when filmmaker Juan Mandelbaum typed in the name of his ex-girlfriend Patricia, he was in for a shock: she was among thousands in Argentina who were kidnapped, tortured and then "disappeared" by the military during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Cine Latino en Nueva York blogger (and frequent filmlinc blog guest) Christian Del Moral spoke with the filmmaker about his process and inspiration for the film *Our Disappeared*.

Christian Del Moral: I did the same google search as you, "Patricia Dixon Argentina", and I was happy to see that the first results were about "Our Disappeared" your documentary! A very personal and powerful one. Do you wish there was more information about Patricia back then?

Juan Mandelbaum: Thanks for your comments on the film. If I had initially found out more details about Patricia's story perhaps I wouldn't have embarked on my journey, and might not have made the film. The shock would have been equally strong, but I guess that sometimes it's good if Google doesn't give you all the answers and forces you to talk to people to learn more.

CD: Were you afraid that "Our Disappeared" might turn into another documentary about the people who were killed by the military. And what makes your film different?

JM: I always knew that it would be different. For one, these stories had never been told before and had particularly dramatic aspects that had never appeared in any other film. More importantly, I was searching for a very intimate look into this tragic period, told from my point of view and therefore inevitably unique.

CD: One of the key moments of the film, is when Ruth Weisz, a Jewish mother that lost her son and daughter in law, talks about the biggest curse in Jewish religion: not being remembered. Was that your main motivation for this documentary, to remember and honor your friends?

JM: Yes, the whole film for me has been an intense exercise in memory. I dug up all kinds of materials, photographs, clippings, outtakes from super-8 films, diaries that helped me remember my own story. And by letting the families tell their stories I hope it will help remember not just these cases but the thousands of others who disappeared.

CH: You visited the Navy Mechanics School where Patricia might have been tortured and killed. What was going through your mind?

JM: We went there twice. The first time we had a number of shots to cover so I was almost numbed in the process. But there was a shot going down the same stairs that the detainees used that was important to me that was out of focus so on another trip we went again, this time with another cameraman who was doing some pick up work. And the second time it all hit me. As I went up the stairs I felt that Patricia and the others would have been clutching the banister as they were led blindfolded and shackled and they were

taunted and hit by the military. At one point I just embraced my producer, who herself was almost taken there as an eight year old (!) and we both broke down. Incredibly the shot was out of focus again! But it didn't matter.

CD: How was the responds from the first screening at the NYJFF?

We had an almost full house, a wide mix of people. Young, old, Argentine, Jewish film festival regulars. At the end you always expect people to leave when the Q&A starts and no one left! The questions and reactions were great, everyone was very moved by the film.

Buy tickets to see Our Disappeared: [Tue Jan 20: 8:30](#)
[Wed Jan 21: 3:45](#)

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