

Excellent selections this year. All the films showed wonderful craft. Direction/writing/acting/cinematography.

But as I watched I saw a connection in all of them. Family. Jewish familial relationships were a theme that ran through every story. Mother and so. Father and daughter. Father and son. Sometimes several generations: grandparents and their descendants. Some parents sacrifice everything for their kids, some don't know their kids at all. All of these actions or non-actions have consequences for everyone involved.

In the story of Romain Gary's life, Promise at Dawn, we see the effect of what we'd call a helicopter mom on her son. Her desire for greatness transferred to her son. Her happiness could only be achieved through his success. She would settle for nothing less than genius and he did not disappoint. Like all Jewish mothers she would live forever as the voice in his head.

IN Longing, a father who wanted no children discovers the love he has for a son he has never met after the boy is dead. In doing so, he comes to understand that his relationship with his own father denied him the joy of parenthood.

IN Budapest Noir – a father rejects his daughter because she wants to marry a rabbi's son to protect her from the Nazi wave sweeping across Europe. In doing so, he destroys his daughter's life and his own.

IN Leona – A girl from a tight knit Jewish family does the unimaginable and falls for a goy and the unknown world outside of her community. Her fear of losing those she loves, for the man she loves, creates an identify crisis. Is she merely an extension of her family and its

traditions or is she her own person able to function in the world on her own terms?

In Winter Hunt – A grandfather who has lived in denial of the despicable actions of his youth is forced to come face to face with a granddaughter he never knew he had. She seeks to hold him responsible for destroying her family.

Why should family be the resounding theme of so many Jewish films? I don't think it's a coincidence. Our Torah is nothing if not a history of our 'family.' From the first man and woman and their offspring, to the first Jewish couple and their children, and their children and their tribes of children. You think you have problems? Imagine what Isaac had to go through with Abraham? Not fun. And how about Esther? She married a non-Jew to save all her lantzman.

Jews have always been accused of being clannish, of acting superior because of their religion. Nobody likes an outsider. People want joiners. And when we've been in places where we've been allowed to join, many have. But many have also struggled with joining. Because if we join what happens to our almost 6,000 year old family? A great question that many of the filmmakers in this festival's films have asked.

So now let's get to the awards. We have two runners up.

First, Budapest Noir a murder mystery set in **Budapest** of 1936 with Antisemitism on the rise. Superbly written, acted, and lensed. Director **Éva Gárdos**

Next runner up – Promise at Dawn – the sweeping mother son epic about the great writer Romain Gary's early life directed by [Eric Barbier](#).

And the grand prize of the 2019 Santa Barbara Jewish festival goes to Leona – About a girl's struggle to find her identify both Jewish and self as she transitions to adulthood. Director - Isaac Cherem