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#AFIDOCS Interview: AFTER SPRING Directors Steph Ching and Ellen Martinez

Description

AFTER SPRING looks at the brutal war in Syria, which has contributed to the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with nearly 60 million people fleeing the conflict. Many escape to Europe while others find themselves in limbo in Jordanâ??s Zaatari refugee camp â?? the largest such camp in the Middle East. Homesick yet haunted by the violence theyâ??ve witnessed, they fear their children may become a â??lost generation.â?• Many struggle with dwindling resources as others become entrepreneurs, finding creative ways to generate income in the camp, while awaiting a permanent home.

AFI spoke to the filmmakers ahead of the AFI DOCS premiere of AFTER SPRING, which is their first feature together. Head to the filmâ??s website for more info.

What inspired you to tell this story?

Martinez: I went to high school in Damascus, Syria, and spent over eight years living in the Middle East. As the conflict in Syria escalated, I was extremely frustrated by how the media failed to talk to the Syrian people and show the human side of the story. Everything was so politicized while thousands of refugees were fleeing to neighboring countries. When an aid organization at the refugee camp Zaatari invited us to Jordan to film, we knew we had to figure out a way to go and help tell a different side to this story.

Ching: I always gravitated towards stories surrounding humanitarian issues but it wasnâ??t until I spent time at the camp that I began to understand how close this hit to my personal history. My grandma was a refugee in China at the end of World War II. She never liked to label herself as a refugee, and, to me, she was just Grandma, but I remember growing up with all of these stories of her â??fleeing warâ?• â?? the soldiers marching through her neighborhood, the few things she brought with her, the journey on the boat. And it wasnâ??t until I started hearing very similar stories from the people we met at Zaatari that I began to make this connection. And the fact that this story is representative of so many peopleâ??s histories, whether it is the current generation or from more than 70 years ago, is so powerful.

How did you find the subject(s) in your film?

We were so inspired by the people we met working and living at the camp â?? from the aid workers struggling tirelessly to keep the camp running, to the families who risked everything to get to the camp and are now trying to rebuild their lives as best they can.

What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

Our film is mostly in Arabic and Korean. We do not speak either of those languages. Being able to put all our trust in our translators, making sure we got everything we needed on location, and then having to put it all together in the edit was a constant challenge. Overall, we had 24 translators contributing to the film. We didnâ??t want to rely on narration and felt it was important for the families to be able to share their own stories and experiences. This actually led to some of our favorite parts of the film, where the families share their home videos from their time back in Syria.

What do you want audiences to walk away with after screening your film?

We hope this movie will help people better understand what it means to be a refugee. The families in our film had happy, fulfilling lives back in Syria before they were forced to flee. No one chooses to become a refugee and we hope our documentary can help audiences put a human face to this issue that is so often generalized in the media. We hope it will inspire some of our audience to get involved with organizations doing work to help in this refugee crisis.

Why do you think Washington, DC, is a valuable location to screen your film?

Some members of Congress have sought to halt refugee admissions to Syrians and to date, the United States has only let in one fifth of its pledged number of 10,000 Syrian refugees for 2016. Being able to screen in Washington, DC, and to meet and invite decision-makers who are directly involved in policies related to resettlement and humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees has potential to influence real change.

AFTER SPRING plays AFI DOCS on Thursday, June 23, 1:00 p.m., and Friday, June 24, 4:15 p.m. Buy tickets here.

{Source: American Film Magazine (blog)â??May 25, 2016}

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