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OUR DISAPPEARED/NUESTROS DESAPARECIDOS,
JUAN MANDELBAUM'S PERSONAL AND HARROWING INVESTIGATION INTO THE FATE OF
FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO WERE AMONG THOSE TORTURED, KILLED AND
"DISAPPEARED" BY THE ARGENTINE MILITARY, TO AIR NATIONALLY ON THE PBS SERIES
***INDEPENDENT LENS* ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2009**

(San Francisco, CA)—**OUR DISAPPEARED/NUESTROS DESAPARECIDOS** is the heartbreaking chronicle of director Juan Mandelbaum's personal search for the souls of friends and loved ones, idealistic young students and activists who were caught in the brutal vise of the right-wing military and "disappeared" in his native Argentina during the 1976–1983 military dictatorship. **OUR DISAPPEARED/NUESTROS DESAPARECIDOS** will air nationally on the Emmy® Award–winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Monday, September 21, 2009, at 10 PM (check local listings).

Mandelbaum's quest was triggered by a recent and very painful revelation. Through a Google search, he made the terrible discovery that Patricia Dixon, a long-lost girlfriend, was among the *desaparecidos*. Juan had left Argentina at the height of the repression to escape the pervasive climate. Almost 30 years later, he returned to Argentina to explore Dixon's story and the stories of other friends and loved ones who had also disappeared. He learned firsthand of the horrors that befell them, indeed the almost 30,000 people who were kidnapped by agents of the military government, secretly detained without trial, brutally tortured and then killed, never to be seen again.

Although idealistic and involved in community organizing, as a youth in Argentina, Mandelbaum was not willing to join the more militant and radical groups that were recruiting many of his friends. Inspired by the Cuban revolution and the election of Chile's Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected Socialist president in the Americas, many of his fellow students at the University's School of Philosophy and Letters were willing to support an armed struggle for a cause they believed in passionately—that former President Juan Perón, who had been exiled to Spain, would lead Argentina on a journey to socialism. It was a hope that was quickly crushed when Perón returned in 1973 and disowned the young radicals who had fought so hard for his return. Instead, right-wing death squads began to pave the way for the military regime that, after 1976, targeted thousands of leftist activists for annihilation. More than 250 of Mandelbaum's fellow students are among the disappeared.

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In **OUR DISAPPEARED, NUESTROS DESAPARECIDOS**, Mandelbaum meets with parents, siblings and children of many of these old friends, piecing together their dramatic stories through reminiscences, home movies and old photos. The film also uses rare and extraordinary archival footage (including a 1977 appearance by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger endorsing the military president) to bring the energy and tension of the time and place to life. It is a quietly devastating story of young lives viciously ended and the unending pain suffered by their families and their country.

To learn more about the film, visit the **OUR DISAPPEARED, NUESTROS DESAPARECIDOS** interactive companion website (www.pbs.org/ourdisappeared), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

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On-Air Speaking Participants

Rafael “Rafa” Belaustegui – A colleague of Juan’s father, Rafa has known Juan since he was a child. He is the father of three children—Valeria, José and Martin—who disappeared, along with their spouses, under Argentina’s military dictatorship.

Susana Caride – Susana is a survivor of the Olimpo secret detention center.

Mercedes Depino – Mercedes Depino was a good friend of Mini Viñas and a cousin of Mini’s husband, Carlitos Goldenberg, both of whom are among the disappeared. She was also involved with the Montoneros guerrilla movement and would also have disappeared had she not fled to Uruguay.

Alejandra (Ale) Dixon – Ale is Patricia Dixon’s younger sister.

Octavio García Faure – Octavio was a co-founder of the camp known as Las Promesas. He is also Juan’s brother-in-law, was a friend of Mini Viñas and Jorge Chinetti, and worked closely with Father Carlos Mugica, another victim of the death squads.

José Pablo Feinmann – José Pablo is a writer and historian in Argentina and a friend of Juan. In his youth, he participated in the leftist faction of the Peronist movement.

Inés Kupersmidt – Inés is the daughter of Mini Viñas and Carlitos Goldenberg. She was only eight months old when Mini was taken. Inés was miraculously saved from the military (which was giving away kidnapped babies for adoption by military and police families) when Mini made the decision to abandon her at the zoo, seconds before she was taken herself. Inés was raised in the United States by her aunt and uncle, who find it very difficult to talk about their tragic past. She is an attorney and lives in Los Angeles, where she works to defend the educational rights of incarcerated children and children with disabilities.

María Rita Lemoine – María Rita was best friends with Patricia Dixon throughout elementary and high school and remained in contact with her until her disappearance.

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Luís, Mercedes and Ramón Lenguaza – The Lenguazas are siblings who attended Las Promesas. They were children when Jorge Chinetti was their counselor, and they remember him fondly.

Mercedes Perez Sabbi – Mercedes worked with Patricia Dixon at the Cuban Embassy before Patricia disappeared. No one disclosed their full names while working there to protect each other from the military in case of being detained, so Mercedes only discovered what had happened to Patricia after a remembrance ad came out in a local paper 15 years later. She wrote a short story and dedicated it to Patricia.

Juan Manuel Weisz – Juan Manuel is the son of Marcelo and Susana Weisz; he was only a baby when his parents were detained. He is proud of what they stood for as activists against the military. Juan has opened a progressive bookstore and cultural center in his provincial hometown.

Ruth Weisz – Ruth is the mother of Marcelo Weisz, a victim of the military dictatorship. After fleeing Germany to escape the Nazis in 1939, she settled in the same neighborhood as Juan's parents, and they were good friends.

Director's Statement

I have always cared deeply about Argentina's trials and tribulations and above all about how our brutal and corrupt governments have affected the lives of people I love. Over the past 35 years, the country has suffered a succession of political and economic calamities, but the greatest of these—and still an open wound—was the organized repression that happened after the March 24, 1976, military coup. Practically everyone knows of someone who disappeared. Argentina will be haunted by this period for a long time. We still don't know what happened in thousands upon thousands of cases. Who took them? Where were they taken? When were they killed? Where are their bodies? For the families there will always be a void. By telling their stories, we can be by their side, letting them know that they are not alone. These are our disappeared.

I have often told my American friends about what happened in Argentina during those dark days, and people are always moved by these dramatic stories. But it wasn't until now that I have felt ready to give my own account. The recent discovery of my former girlfriend's disappearance triggered this telling. I became the narrator, and my own personal story is intertwined with the stories of the people I knew who disappeared.

I have made a number of documentary films on social and historical issues, which has given me the necessary experience to tackle this difficult story. So I felt well prepared to embark on this journey. But it has also been very emotionally charged. Talking with people about their deep losses and going back to the places where the repression happened was very moving. Most people I interviewed had never talked publicly about what they went through, and I am very grateful for their trust. Before finishing the film, I showed it to the people who appear in the film to make sure that I had done justice to their stories. I feel a deep responsibility toward them and toward our history, but ultimately, these are only my views.

My editor and co-producer, David Carnochan, and I also wanted to give the historical context for what happened in Argentina during the 1970s. From the revolutionary dreams to the vast repression that followed, from Perón's return to power to the junta's deliberate elimination plan, the film touches upon issues that have previously been avoided, like the violence from the left. But the film leaves no doubt that there was no equivalency between the actions of the left and the repression by the military. The military represented the state of Argentina and was obligated to follow the law.

By including the children of the disappeared, the film shows that there is hope even after such an enormous tragedy and that my friends' legacy will live on for a long time. There could be no better homage.

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JUAN MANDELBAUM, Writer, Producer and Director

Juan Mandelbaum has been recognized as a documentary filmmaker and has also worked as teacher, curator and consultant. He is president and creative director of GEOVISION, a Massachusetts-based multicultural communications agency.

Juan's work has been broadcast on a variety of venues, from *American Playhouse* to *Sesame Street*, and has won multiple awards, including Emmy® awards and nominations, CINE Golden Eagles, Gabriel awards, a Chris Award, and a Silver Apple Award. Juan was a producer/director at WGBH-Boston on *Americas*, a 10-part series on Latin America and the Caribbean for PBS and Channel 4-UK, for which he co-produced *In Women's Hands* and produced *Builders of Images*.

Juan's independent productions have aired on PBS and screened at many festivals and are in worldwide distribution. His films include *Caetano in Bahia*, *Ringl and Pit*, *A New World of Music* and the *Poetry Heaven* series, about the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival.

Juan studied sociology in his native Argentina and worked as a journalist, photographer and educator until he emigrated to the United States in 1977 to leave behind the military dictatorship. He holds an M.A. in communications from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, which in 1998 honored him with the Merrill Panitt Citizenship Award, an award given every year to a distinguished alumnus. Juan is past president of International Film Seminars, organizer of the Flaherty Film Seminars.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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