

A film festival of inspiration in Forest Hills

by Michael Gannon

Growing up in Texas, filmmaker Jill Jones remembers her cousin having a difficult time on Christmas morning.

“All the sights and sounds of people opening presents, talking and taking pictures was too much for him,” Jones said. “At first I was too young to understand. I remember thinking, ‘What would make you not want to open your Christmas presents?’”

Her cousin is autistic, and Jones’ film, titled “Spectrum: A Story of the Mind,” will be just one of several featured at the ninth annual ReelAbilities Film Festival, hosted on March 5 and 6 at the Central Queens Y.

Jones’ short documentary delves into the sensory aspects of various sectors of the autism spectrum, and how things like light, noise, smell and other factors can impact people.

Jeri Mendelsohn, executive vice president and CEO of the Samuel Field Y and the Central Queens Y, said ReelAbilities has festivals elsewhere in New York, as well as places like Cincinnati, San Francisco and even Israel.

“We joined because we felt it was important to spotlight issues with relation to people with disabilities,” she said.



COURTESY PHOTO

A scene from ‘My Hero Brother,’ an Israeli film about people with Down syndrome trekking through the Himalayas with their siblings.

Other selected films scheduled for the Forest Hills event touch on Down syndrome, Parkinson’s disease and others.

Mendelsohn said the selection process is a rigorous one, and that the Central Queens Y staff then chose from the accepted films which ones will be shown locally.

“It’s not a competition, but we do have films that have been in juried film festivals,” she said.

Jones told the Chronicle she works in the industry as a producer, with a roster of clients that includes National Geographic, ESPN Films, Bravo, Animal Planet, Esquire and ABC. But she did “Spectrum” independently.

“This was personal for me,” she said.

She also said the timing of the Forest Hills festival is good for the cause of the disabled, and for her film.

Her opus will be featured on PBS beginning on April 1.

“April is National Autism Awareness Month,” she said.

Several of the directors will be on hand as they discuss their films with viewers.

“I’m looking forward to being there,” Jones said.