

Where Is Joel Baum

(2012, USA)

A film by Pearl Gluck



Contact: Pearl Gluck
Palinka Pictures
646-247-7329
pearl@palinkapictures.com

Where Is Joel Baum

(2012, USA)

A film by Pearl Gluck

A tragic accident causes unexpected consequences in the home of a Hasidic rabbi in contemporary Brooklyn. The Grand Rabbi's wife is forced to reconsider her loyalties when she discovers that the culprit is her grandson, heir to her husband's dynasty, and more obsessed with Lenny Bruce than the Talmud. Instead of calling the Hasidic vigilante patrol, she calls the police, unraveling sixty years of traditions she and her husband put into play.



Where Is Joel Baum
(2012, USA)
A film by Pearl Gluck

Joel Baum is still single in his 30s, which is unheard-of in his tight-knit Hasidic community, let alone for a Grand Rabbi's grandson. His parents and siblings were killed in a car accident when he was nine years old, which makes him the only heir to the dynasty. Since then he has lived in his grandparent's home and was raised by his grandmother, the *rebetsin* (the Grand Rabbi's wife). His interests, however, lean more toward his Harley and Lenny Bruce than becoming the next Grand Rabbi.

On a particular Friday afternoon, Joel has an arranged date with a young lady. It is also a day when the regular cleaning lady is out sick, and Anya, a day-laborer is hired to take her place. The date takes a dark turn, and Joel comes onto Anya instead. Their interaction, fraught with sexual frustration and their shared histories, leads to a tragic accident. In a fit of rage and then regret, Joel inadvertently kills Anya.

By the time the *rebetsin* returns from the grocery store to discover Anya murdered on her kitchen floor, Joel is in his room sobbing. Local custom would dictate that she call the *shomrim*, the Hasidic vigilante patrol, to handle the situation. Instead, she calls the police. The murder precipitates a crisis of faith for the *rebetsin* and she questions the system she and her husband designed to keep the community safe, self-contained, and independent of external authorities.

The director of the *shomrim*, Reb Hersh rushes to the Grand Rabbi's house before the police get there. It is his mission to respectfully implore her to let him take Joel out of the house before the police discover his whereabouts. What follows is a debate, hinging on Talmudic arguments: The *rebetsin* insists that one must follow the rules of the country in which they settle, and Reb Hersh insists that turning in one's own to "outsider" authorities is akin to murder, which would make the *rebetsin* a murderer.

By the time the police arrive, Joel has escaped. As Reb Hersh liaises with his long-time partner at the NYPD, Detective Robertson, it becomes clear that this time, the authorities will not allow the *shomrim* to interfere with the case. The loyalties and relationship between Reb Hersh and Detective Robertson is challenged.

In the end, as the Grand Rabbi and his *rebetsin* are unsure if they did what was right, Joel is sitting in a barber's chair, getting his beard and *peyos* shaved off.

Director's Statement:

Inspired by historical events that occurred in contemporary post-Holocaust Williamsburg along with aspects of my own life in the Hasidic world, *Where is Joel Baum* explores the challenges of maintaining voluntary spiritual segregation in an open pluralistic society. This story also opens a Polish-Jewish dialogue that involves both communities' shared pre-Holocaust history and the bizarre fate of their co-existence in present-day Brooklyn. Ethnic, cultural, and religious differences come to the fore as the principal characters grapple with the *rebetsin's* phone call and the fraught history of fifty years of communal relations.

Using my own background as a Hasid, a Fulbright student in East/Central Europe (particularly Poland), and also a documentary filmmaker, I approached the process of writing this script as a collaborative experience. All the actors worked extensively with me to create their roles. Luzer Twersky, himself an ex-Hasid, developed the role of Joel Baum with me. Danusia Roberts, herself once a cleaning lady, inspired aspects of her role. Tibor Feldman contributed his own Hungarian post-Holocaust history and knowledge of the Talmud. I am intrigued by cultural prescription by communal leaders in Hasidic communities as well as the compliance, circumvention or defiance by Hasidic women. I worked with Lynn Cohen to develop that aspect of her character as a powerful leader in what may seem like a patriarchal world. All the actors were carefully chosen to inspire a dialogue that allowed for the interactions that emerged.

I've also used documentary resources to enhance the fictional characters and situations in the script. The script reflects my commitment to East European Hasidic history and how it is intricately interwoven with post-Holocaust American establishment of Hasidic dynasties and identities. My research included Yiddish-language interviews with various people who were involved in the actual murder. One interview on videotape is with the "real-life" Reb Hersh (nicknamed "Mendele Chicago") in Kiryas Joel, in which he speaks about how he "cleaned up" crime-ridden Williamsburg in the fifties. One of his stories depicts himself on a particular Saturday night after *melave malke* (the meal after the Sabbath), patrolling the streets outfitted in his *shtrayml* and *bekeshe* (the traditional Hasidic garb worn by married men) carrying two shotguns and escorted by a German shepherd. He showed me various documents and paraphernalia from his relationship with the NYPD, including the badge given to him by the Captain, the real-life Robertson, and a letter from the mayor welcoming him on board. In the feature project emerging from the short, I would like to explore the possibility of incorporating these moments from the past of these two men, Reb Hersh and Detective Robertson, in the fiction script.

Biographies of the Filmmaking Team:

Pearl Gluck – Director/Writer

Pearl Gluck was awarded a 2000 Sundance Producer's Lab fellowship and a 2001 Sundance Festival mentorship for *Divan*, her first documentary film. *Divan* was broadcast on the Sundance Channel, theatrically premiered at the Film Forum in New York and played at festivals around the world. In July 2011, she was a contributing producer for WTIU, the Indiana PBS affiliate and reviewed the Midwest Best Biker Fest. She released *Soundwalk: Williamburg* in 2007 on Paris Premiere, and won an Audie Award for the audio edition of the project. Her first short film that she co-wrote, *Goyta* (2007) premiered at Cannes. In 1996 she received a Fulbright grant to Hungary to collect Hasidic stories. Currently, she is an MFA student at CCNY and, for WTIU she is directing and producing a documentary on AHEYM, a project about Indiana University professors Jeffrey Veidlinger and Dov Ber Kerler who collected an 800-hour archive of Eastern Europe's last native Yiddish speakers.

Flavio Alves – Producer

Flavio Alves is a Brazilian writer, film director, and producer. He was granted political asylum in the United States in 1998 with the help of the Immigrants and Refugee Rights Clinic at New York University's School of Law. Shortly thereafter, he attended Columbia University, where he earned an undergraduate degree in Political Science. After graduating, Alves worked as an assistant to then-New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Former Congressman Anthony Weiner (D-NY). In 2007, Flavio returned to school to study film production at New York University, where he received the Technisphere Award for Outstanding Achievement. Since then, he has directed and produced more than 20 films. His most recent completed project, *The Secret Friend*, premiered at the 2010 Palm Springs International Film Festival and has entered more than 90 film festivals around the world. *The Secret Friend* received 23 awards, including Best Short Film at Cleveland International Film Festival, Palm Springs International Film Festival, and Savannah Film Festival. Flavio Alves is the founder of Queens Picture, and is currently working on his upcoming short film, *Tom in America*.

James Gagne, Jr. – Producer

James Gagne is a truck driver who is new to the film industry. His knack for storytelling and his ability to understand what it takes to pull together and run a crew was apparent on his first venture, *Where Is Joel Baum*.

Rony Cohen – Producer

Rony Cohen is a graduate of Tel Aviv University. He has worked on productions such as *Gossip Girls*, *30 Rock*, and *Now You See Me*. His own directorial work includes his short films, *House Cat* (2009), *Pomelo* (2009), and *Basketball Court* (2009). *Where Is Joel Baum* is his producerial debut.

Timur Civan – Cinematographer

Timur Civan is an NYU graduate who is a visual artist and cinematographer. His work has been featured on the Sundance Channel, Discovery Channel, Raging Nation Films, CNN, MTV, Little Marvin Big Media, BCBG, and Elle Int'l, to name a few. He is currently shooting *Turning Point*, a feature project set in Nigeria and directed by Niyi Towolawi. *Where Is Joel Baum* is his first collaboration with Pearl Gluck.

Alison Mao – Editor

Alison Mao is a graduate of NYU's Tisch and an Editor at Berwyn Editorial/Outside Editorial, full service post-production houses in NYC, working with clients such as Jaguar, Old Navy, Resolve, and Frenchs. She also edits and produces shorts and web series. Past projects include *Chords*, *Man of the People*, and *Pretty Girl* to name a few. Currently, she is working on two web series and *Where Is Joel Baum*.

Selected Cast Bios and Credits:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Lynn Cohen/Rebetsin Stein | Damages, TV Episodes (USA; 2009-2012) Sex and the City 1 and 2 (USA; 2008, 2010) Munich (USA; 2005) Sex and the City, TV Episodes (2000-2004) The Station Agent (USA; 2003) Deconstructing Harry (USA; 1997) Vanya on 42 nd Street (USA; 1994) |
| Luzer Twersky/Joel Baum | Manhattan Melody (USA; 2011) Romeo and Juliet in Yiddish (USA; 2010) |
| Danusia Trevino/Anyia | The Louise Log, TV Series (2008-2011) |
| Tibor Feldman/Reb Hersh | The Good Wife, TV Series (2011) Loving Leah (USA; 2009) Damages, TV Series (USA; 2009) Enchanted (USA; 2007) Brooklyn Rules (USA; 2007) The Devil Wears Prada (USA; 2006) |
| Arthur French/Detective | Gods Behaving Badly (USA; 2012) Nurse Jackie, TV Series (2011) Law & Order, TV Series (1994-2003) Crooklyn (USA; 1994) Car Wash (USA; 1976) |
| Shayna Levine/Malki | Palindromes (USA; 2004) |
| Elli/Rabbi Kesselman | Blue Bloods, TV Series (USA; 2010-2011) The Big C, TV Series (USA; 2011) Boardwalk Empire, TV Series (USA; 2010) Law & Order, TV Series (2007-2009) Loving Leah (USA; 2009) |

Trailer:

- www.whereisjoelbaum.com and click on TEASER

Contact: Pearl Gluck
Palinka Pictures
646-247-7329
pearl@palinkapictures.com

