

Family reunion the theme of veteran director Samir's latest film Iraqi Odyssey

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Ah, the family reunion. Aunts and uncles, cousins and their kids, your cousins once-removed that you haven't seen in years. Everyone trying to glean just exactly what everyone else does for a living – a mail sorter, the manager of a co-op grocery store, a district bank something-or-another – but really, it's all a prelude to share stories from your common past: inside jokes, gossip about those not in attendance, lore about a deceased grandparent.

Of course, the family reunion isn't always as much fun for outsiders, spouses who never met Uncle Jim, or distant relatives who weren't part of that unforgettable trip to Disneyland.

The documentary *Iraqi Odyssey* – which had its world premiere on Saturday at the Toronto International Film Festival and will be screened during the Abu Dhabi Film Festival (ADFF) in October – is what family reunions might look like in the future.

It traces the history of one Iraqi family scattered around the globe. There's Amm Jamal, for example, who now lives in Moscow, and the lovely Souhair, who lives in bleak, freezing upstate New York.

The movie features sepia-toned pics of a family picnic in the hillside, maqam music and a funny story from Amm Sabah, the ophthalmologist, about that time he returned to Basra only to be told he had been declared dead. But this reunion is filmed in 3-D and is able to splice family photos, archival footage and calligraphy next to the storyteller.

“3-D enchanted me,” says the director, Samir, who turned the camera on his own family. “The film is a puzzle, a 3-D puzzle. A stereoscopic puzzle.

“In reality, every day we get a piece of the puzzle and we try to make sense of it. It’s a part of the mind, in my opinion. It’s built on memories and concrete details, a mix. When you talk to neuroscientists, an objective past does not exist.”

Original article by Craig Courtice

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