

Make a wish (Itmanna)

A film by Cherien Dabis



Synopsis

A young Palestinian girl will do whatever it takes to buy a birthday cake. Eleven year-old MARIAM begs her mother for the extra money she needs to buy a cake at the local bakery. Her mother begrudgingly relents, but when Mariam arrives at the bakery, she realizes that she still doesn't have enough. Determined to get the cake, she sets out to brave the obstacles and land some cash. What begins as a simple trip to the bakery turns into a journey that depicts not only the subtle tensions of a politically charged environment, but also illustrates the grief that can result from growing up under occupation.

Cherien Dabis, Palestine 2006, 12 min, colour, 35mm, Arabic with English subtitles

Credits

Mariam	Mayar Rantisse
Lama	Lone Khilleh
Aida	Iman Aoun
Writer	Cherien Dabis
Director	Cherien Dabis
Producer	Cherien Dabis
Editor	Cherien Dabis
DOP	Alison Kelly
Music	Kathryn Bostic
Production Designer	Cherien Dabis
Casting Director	Iman Aoun

Technical Specs

Shooting Format	Mini-DV
Screening Format	35mm/Digibeta
Running Time	12 minutes
Country of Production	Palestine
Sound	Dolby SR
Languages	Arabic
Subtitles	English

Director's Statement

Make A Wish is an intimate personal journey that follows Mariam on the day of her late father's birthday. While the film doesn't definitively deal with how her father died, political references throughout indicate that his death was related to the political turmoil in the region. The film was inspired by the idea of absence, specifically the many Palestinian men who are absent from their families due to imprisonment or death. And little is ever known about who they were or what they left behind. I wanted to pay tribute to the grief of the surviving loved ones. And I wanted to portray that grief through the eyes of a child.

The film is shot semi-documentary style in order to capture the realism of the Palestinian experience and to build a sense of urgency. The stakes are high for Mariam. She must be able to buy the cake before the end of the day, or it will be too late. Mariam's desperation is telegraphed through long lenses so that the audience is immersed in her point-of-view. The audience sees the world through her selective eyes. The eyes of a grieving child with but one thing on her mind: buying her father's favorite cake in order to celebrate his life and honor his memory. The tone of the film is one of a drama with a light touch. Moments of candid humor shine through to ease the tension of Mariam's journey.

Thematically, *Make A Wish* explores the devastating impact of political conflict and war: love, loss and grief on a deep, personal level. It offers a glimpse into a family working through expressions of grief, each member dealing with it in a vastly different manner. The film is both a celebration of life and a work of mourning.

Cherien Dabis

Born to Palestinian immigrant parents, award-winning independent filmmaker and television writer Cherien Dabis has been recognized by the industry's top organizations and trade publications, including the Sundance Institute, IFP and Filmmaker Magazine. A 2004 graduate of Columbia University's Masters of Fine Arts Film program, Dabis' short films have screened at some of the world's top film festivals. Her latest, *Make A Wish*, premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival as well as Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival where it won the Prix de la Presse and Mention Spéciale du Jury. The film went on to win top awards in Dubai, Rotterdam, Cairo and Aspen. Dabis received several generous grants in support of the film, including the National Geographic's All Roads Film Project Seed Grant, the Jerome Foundation's New York City Media Arts Grant as well as the New York State Council on the Art's Electronic Media and Film Distribution Grant.

Currently in development on *Amreeka*, her feature film writing and directing debut slated to begin production in the fall of 2007, Dabis was invited to participate in the Sundance Institute's 2005 Middle East Screenwriter's Lab, 2006 Cannes Film Festival's Mediterranean Films Crossing Borders program and 2007 Berlinale Co-Production Market. An alumni of Film Independent's 2005 Director's Lab, Project: Involve Mentorship Program and Los

Angeles Film Festival's Fast Track Program, Dabis also received a 2006 Artist Fellowship in Screenwriting from the New York Foundation for the Arts in support of the screenplay. She was most recently honored with the L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth Vision Award at the 2007 Tribeca Film Festival. Screen International listed *Amreeka* as one of their "Ten Arab Films to Watch" in 2007.

Dabis is an accomplished Staff Writer and Co-Producer on Showtime Network's original hit series *The L Word* and has been with the show for three seasons. As a feature film screenwriter, she has been awarded several distinguished awards in support of her screenplays including the Zaki Gordon Award for Excellence in Screenwriting, the Institute for Humane Studies Film and Fiction Scholarship and the New York Women in Film and Television Scholarship. In 2003, Dabis was awarded a Screenwriting Grant from the

Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up (Power Up) for her short screenplay *Little Black Boot* (acquired by The Sundance Channel). Premiering at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, the film went on to win several Best Short Film awards and was a Grand Prize Winner of the 2004 PlanetOut.com Short Movie Awards. Dabis is also a recipient of the Power Up Filmmaker's Fund for her short *Memoirs of an Evil Stepmother* (acquired by MTV/Logo). Her short film-writing debut, *Nadah*, premiered at the 2003 Rotterdam International Film Festival and was nominated for the VC Film Festival's Golden Reel Award. Her production credits include Jane Campion's psychological thriller *In the Cut* and NBC's critically acclaimed television series *The West Wing*.

Filmography

- *Itmanna (Make A Wish)*, 2006, 12 min
- *Memoirs of an Evil Stepmother*, 2004, 18 min
- *Little Black Boot* (as writer), 2003, 16 min
- *Nadah* (as writer), 2003, 15 in
- *The L Word* (as co-producer, Showtime Networks), 2005-2007

Festivals/Awards (Full list available online)

Sundance Film Festival

Berlin International Film Festival

Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival - *Prix de la Presse & Mention Spéciale du Jury*

Aspen Shortsfest - *Special Jury Award & BAFTA Award for Excellence*

Dubai International Film Festival - *Gold Muhr Award for Best Short Film*

Cairo International Film Festival for Children - *Ministry of Culture's Golden Prize for Best Short Film & Bronze Cairo for Best Short Film*

Arab Film Festival Rotterdam - *Silver Hawk Award for Best Short Film*

Big Bear Lake International Film Festival - *Jury Award, Best Family Film*

South by Southwest Film Festival

Edinburgh International Film Festival

Chicago International Children's Film Festival – *Liv Ullmann Peace Prize & Certificate of Excellence, Live-action Short Film*

Reviews

"... reinforces the power of short films and the ability to achieve cinematic greatness within the span of a few minutes." --Phil Hall, *Film Threat*

"Very moving and thought provoking." --John Razook, *The Austin Chronicle*

"... it is the natural, often charming, performances that give this 12-minute film its heart." --Angus Wolfe Murray, *Eye for Eye Film*