

A Place at the Table: New documentary film looks at food insecurity in America

By MORDECAI SPECKTOR

A 1968 CBS report titled “Hunger in America” shocked the American public and galvanized a governmental response to the societal crisis. The new documentary film *A Place at the Table* tells of how an array of federal programs — food stamps, elderly feeding, school breakfast and lunch — succeeded in nearly ending hunger in this country by the late 1970s.

Fast forward to 2012, when nearly 30 percent of families in the U.S. — more than 49 million people, and one in four children — are categorized as “food insecure”; they don’t know where their next meal is coming from.

This is not in a less developed country in Africa — this is reality in American cities and rural areas.

A Place at the Table, which focuses on three families grappling with hunger, in Philadelphia, Colorado and Mississippi, aims to spark a response, as “Hunger in America” did 35 years ago. The film opens March 1 at the Uptown Theatre in Minneapolis.

The film is co-directed by Lori Silverbush and Kristi Jacobson, two Jewish filmmakers. Jacobson previously directed an acclaimed documentary call *Toots*, about her grandfather, the famous New York saloonkeeper Toots Shor.

A Place at the Table tells the stories of families grappling with hunger, and offers an overview of the issue from various experts. Also

appearing are Oscar-winning actor Jeff Bridges, who is the founder of the End Hunger Network; and Tom Colicchio, celebrity chef, author and head judge on the hit Bravo reality cooking series *Top Chef*. Colicchio, one of the film’s executive producers, also happens to be married to Silverbush.

Lori Silverbush talked to the Jewish World last October, when *A Place at the Table* screened at the Twin Cities Film Fest.

She has written and directed fictional narrative films, but this is her first feature documentary.

I mentioned a Minnesota connection in the film: U.S. Rep. John Kline, the Republican from Minnesota’s Second District, is shown speaking out in Congress against funding for child nutrition programs. About \$10 billion was sought for the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Finally, Congress passed a bill allocating \$4.5 billion — one half of the money was taken from the food stamp program.

“I’m glad you picked up on that,” Silverbush said about the footage from the Capitol.

She added, “I really hope that this film isn’t polarizing, because I don’t think it is. When I sit down with

people who don’t share my political views, we actually have quite a bit in common when it comes to certain things. There is no one in this country that wants to see kids go hungry.”

The question is how exactly to fix the problem, she allowed.

“When I started this film, people were surprised or just didn’t really believe in the concept of first-world hunger,” said Silverbush. “They’re right to be surprised, because this is a pretty wealthy nation. We have an abundance of food, and hunger in this country isn’t an issue of scarcity at all.”

Food insecurity means that millions of American families are making daily compromises, juggling their bills, in order to scrape together meals.

As Jeff Bridges says, regarding his anti-hunger activism, “It’s about patriotism really, you know... How do you envision your country? Do you envision it as a country where one in four kids are hungry?”

***A Place at the Table* opens March 1 at the Uptown Theatre, 2906 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis.**



Courtesy of Magnolia Pictures
Lori Silverbush