



[home](#) | [about us](#) | [editorial](#) | [contact us](#) | [subscribe](#)

Search

[Login]

- [Daily News Update](#)
 - [Current Issue](#)
 - | [Cover Story](#)
 - | [Feature Stories](#)
 - | [This Week's News](#)
 - | [Personnel File](#)
 - | [Editor's Notes](#)
 - [Sample Issue](#)
 - [Sample Database](#)
 - [Who's Who Listings](#)
 - [Corporate Edition](#)
 - [Features](#)
 - [Search Past Issues](#)
- For Reference
- | [Securities In Registration](#)
 - | [Who's Hot, Who's Not](#)
 - | [Aftermarket Performance](#)
 - | [Corporate Data](#)

- Investment Banking Database
- | [Technology](#)
 - | [Telecommunications](#)
 - | [Media/Entertainment](#)
 - | [Figs](#)
 - | [Healthcare](#)
 - | [Industrials](#)
 - | [Energy](#)
 - | [Retail](#)
 - | [Real Estate](#)
 - | [Private Equity](#)
 - | [M & A](#)

[Back to IDD This Week](#)

Cover: Investing in a Heritage
Avital Louria Hahn
(avital.hahn@sourcemediacom.com)
May 14, 2007

When UBS TMT Vice Chairman **Aryeh Bourkoff** arrived for the closing night of his documentary, "*The Last Jews of Libya*," at the Tribeca Film Festival on May 6, the place was so packed he had to give up his seat.

The film, which recounts the last decades of Libya's ancient Sephardic Jewish community through the story of the Roumani family, drew more than 300 that night and about 1,000 over four screenings - quite respectable for a film that started out as a home-made family-history project.

Bourkoff and his mother, **Vivienne Roumani-Denn**, started the project in 2004 in order to fulfill Bourkoff's passion to preserve the story of their family and that of the now-extinct Libyan Jewish community for Aryeh's children and for generations to come. But Bourkoff is not your ordinary first-time producer - after all, he is vice chairman of technology, media and telecom at UBS - so the amateurish undertaking quickly turned into a professional production.

Narrated by **Isabella Rossellini** and edited professionally with vintage Mussolini footage, "*Last Jews*" became something of a box-office hit. So much so that on the last screening Bourkoff and his mother had to banish themselves to the theater halls and peek in through the cracks.

"It is thrilling," e-mailed Bourkoff from his Blackberry the following morning. "I am flattered and very pleased that so many people connected with our story."

In some ways, the film is more than a visual way to preserve a precious heritage; it also has something of an entrepreneurial aspect. Bourkoff, an investment banker who thinks daily about the business of



ETFS, ETNS,
ET COMMODITIES,
AND MORE

FREE TRIAL
Subscribe Now!

Email the Editor
Advertise in IDD

First Half 2006
League Tables
| [Global Rankings](#)
| [Domestic Rankings](#)
| [Municipal Rankings](#)
| [M&A Tables](#)
| [Global Loans](#)

First Quarter
2006 League
Tables
| [Global Rankings](#)
| [Domestic Rankings](#)
| [Municipal Rankings](#)

Fourth Quarter
2006 League
Tables
| [Top Legal/Financial Advisers](#)

movies, is indeed curious about how far the film will go commercially and whether it will recoup the investment. Bourkoff declines to disclose what he spent, but it's a safe bet that the tab came in at several hundred thousand dollars, on the low end of what documentaries generally cost, according to entertainment pros.

And then there is the fact that appetite for family documentaries has picked up. The film is booked for the Jerusalem Film Festival in July and has been bought by the Sundance Channel, which plans to air it in December. It also aired at the ECU, an independent European film festival in Paris, this spring.

"Families have long been the subject of documentary films, but there seems to be an uptick recently in films made by family members about their own families," says **Larry Aidem**, CEO of **Sundance Channel**.

Aidem himself had an indirect and important role in making the film a reality. A business contact and friend of Bourkoff's, he helped Bourkoff network his way to Amanda Zinoman, a documentary professional who edited the film. He also helped connect him to the Italian actress Rossellini, with whom he had been working on various projects. Rossellini herself has been involved in a number of documentaries and has produced her own, "*My Dad is 100*."

"Documentaries, especially personal ones, can put a human face onto history, politics and culture, thereby giving viewers emotional access to a world they might otherwise know nothing about," Aidem says. "I think this is very appealing and rewarding for the audience."

In many ways, the film is the story of the entire Libyan Jewish community and the one million Jews of Arab lands that fled their homes around the time Israel became a state. But unlike other Arab countries, where a handful of Jews may have remained, not one of the 36,000 Jews living in Libya at the end of World War II resides there today.

The 50-minute film recounts the story of the most recent three generations of Roumanis who lived in the port city of Benghazi. Like other Jewish Libyan families, they had lived in Libya for centuries, if not millennia. From Ottoman rule, through Mussolini and Hitler, to the creation of the state of Israel and the rise of Arab nationalism, the film traces the Roumanis' trials and perseverance, their strong Jewish faith, and their close-knit family and community life. Although they enjoyed good relations with the Arab population for many years, rising hostilities in the Mussolini era, and later following the establishment of Israel, made life increasingly difficult.

The family debated leaving but was concerned it might end up scattered. Finally, in 1962, Bourkoff's mother, Roumani-Denn, along with her brother Elia and her parents, Elise and Yosef Roumani, immigrated to the US. By then the two other children, Maurice and Jacques, had already left for university studies in the US, so coming to the US would mean that the family stayed together.

Some Jews remained in Libya until 1967, when days after the Six Day

[M&A](#)
[| Global/US](#)
[Rankings](#)

[First Half Loans](#)
[Rankings](#)
[| Loan Rankings](#)

[First-Half M&A](#)
[| M&A Rankings](#)

You will need to have Adobe Acrobat reader to view the league tables.



War they were airlifted by the Italian government and the Red Cross. **Bene Dabush**, one of the last airlifted, was a youngster and still remembers that night flight. Deeply bonded with his fellow Libyan Jews, he came to the screening opening night from Boston.

"Nobody would separate us," says the Benghazi-born Dabush, who brought along his oldest son Jeremy, 17, to see the movie. "We went through so much together."

The film's narrative arc is based on a memoir written in Italian by the family's matriarch, Elise Tammam-Roumani, and discovered after her death. It contains numerous interviews in English, Hebrew, Italian, and Arabic with several generations of Roumanis and other members of the Libyan Jewish community, now scattered all over the world. With vintage footage from the National Archives and the Italian archive Luce, the film has also captured the interest of those not related to the Libyan community.

"You hear so much about Jews from Poland and Eastern Europe," says Carol Silverman, a Manhattan therapist and friend of Roumani-Denn and her husband, Morton. "You never hear about Jews from Libya."

From Wall Street to Tribeca

The movie got its start because of Aryeh Bourkoff's burning desire to pass the family's stories and traditions on to his children. With a wife and family of his own, a great job, good health and many living relatives, he felt fortunate. But one thing kept gnawing at him: unless documented and told, the family's unique story might fade into obscurity. The time to document the past is now, he thought, before the relatives who lived through those epic years of the 20th century die off.

"As I got older and began to have children, I felt a strong desire to know and a real anxiety about not knowing," says Bourkoff. "What a tragedy it would be to have an interesting story of your background and have your story lost."

So in late 2004, he had an idea. His mother Vivienne, a professional librarian and organizational development specialist, happened to be between jobs. What better than to ask his mother to tell the story so that it could be preserved for his children and for generations to come? So he asked.

"Before I even answered, Aryeh said he meant film," says Roumani-Denn, who was well-versed in oral history projects but had never before produced a film. Several years earlier, she completed a research project with a grant from the University of California at Berkeley on the Jewish community of Libya and had interviewed Libyan Jews in Israel. Her brother, Maurice Roumani, a professor at Ben Gurion University in Israel, had also researched Libyan Jewish history and has written a forthcoming book by the same title as the movie. But Roumani-Denn had never interviewed members of her own family.

With this new challenge, Roumani-Denn bought a video camera and for the next year and a half traveled to interview relatives who escaped

Libya and were now living in Israel, Italy, France and the UK. By the time she finished the research in mid-2006, Rounami-Denn had filmed more than 80 hours of footage and had gathered more than 1,000 photographs.

"She came back with so much footage, it was almost like having nothing," says Bourkoff. "Had she come back with a half hour of footage, the project would have been over, but with over 80 hours, I thought we needed some help."

As it turned out, the fun was just beginning. Bourkoff, as some on Wall Street may recall, was for many years a top-notch telecom research analyst. He has just become an investment banker, and is now UBS's TMT head. With all those years in media, he is well-connected. So Bourkoff told his good friend, Sundance Channel CEO Aidem, about the mountain of footage and the need for a professional to whip them into shape.

Aidem helped Bourkoff find professional documentary film editor **Amanda Zinoman**, who had edited and produced numerous films, television specials, and segments for television series, including "*Conversations with Warren Buffet*" for a Charlie Rose special on PBS. She also made many documentaries including "*The Lost Children of Rockdale County*," which won a Peabody award in 2000.

But crafting a movie is not a linear process. With so much material, the question was how to tell the story. Morton, Roumani-Denn's husband, had the idea to use Tammam-Roumani's memoir. The work not only vividly described the family's daily life in Benghazi; it also provided a timeline for those crucial decades of the first half of the 20th century through the Italian occupation of Libya, Mussolini's alliance with Hitler, the British occupation, the end of the World War II, and the appearance of American companies and pockets of American culture in Libya in later years.

To Roumani-Denn, it was almost as if her mother had already anticipated Bourkoff's request and prepared the memoir for generations to come. "My son asked me, his mother, to tell the story of the family for my grandchildren, when my mother had already written the story for her grandchildren," she says.

"The memoir brought everything to life," says Zinoman. It also gave the movie its structure, as the film could now be narrated by the matriarch. But with whose voice? Here again, Aidem came to the rescue. He asked Bourkoff whom he had in mind as narrator, and without blinking, Bourkoff said they wanted Rossellini, not only a world-class actress who suited the role, but also an Italian. The Roumanis spoke Italian fluently and were well acculturated in things Italian. By another fortuitous coincidence, Aidem was working with Rossellini on Sundance-related projects and was in contact with her. She agreed.

While a major star, Rossellini nonetheless arrived to the first meeting with little fanfare and no entourage or makeup, recalls Bourkoff. But her impact was felt as soon as she began to read the script in the voice

of Elise Tammam-Roumani, the matriarch. Indeed, it was the mother figure that drew Rossellini to the film. "It's the mother's voice which was so touching," Rossellini said at the film's opening night at the Tribeca Film Festival.

Rossellini's passion was felt throughout the film. "When we were recording her, we realized the project had a whole new level," Bourkoff says.

"Her voice was sweet but strong just like my mother's," says Roumani-Denn. "We thought of several actors, but she is the one who did it."

Along the way, Zinoman, working closely with Roumani-Denn, had to make many, sometimes painful, decisions to exclude compelling material that didn't serve the whole. After narrowing the 80 hours into a movie-length spine, with all the facts lined up chronologically and logically, something was still missing, Zinoman says. It was one of those creative junctures that called for emotional glue to bind everything together.

Bourkoff, however, again stated his vision-that the movie was about family unity, a quest for freedom and continuity. That did it, as Zinoman and Roumani-Denn now included the bris of Bourkoff's youngest son, Evan Yosef, who was born while the movie was being completed.

They also included the bar mitzvah of Maurice Roumani in Libya, when he got a gold pen from his English teacher, a Muslim Brotherhood member, as well as footage of Bourkoff's bar mitzvah in the US. The film concludes with Evan's bris, which brings the narrative to the present and the family's ongoing heritage - in the US.

The film was completed in January, after about four months of editing. And now the question is whether Bourkoff will make more movies.

Roumani-Denn certainly plans to. And while Wall Street has been increasingly pouring money into movies, Sundance Channel's Aidem does not think that the general trend has anything to do with Bourkoff's film odyssey.

"This film seems to me to be a very personal project for both Aryeh and his mother, Vivienne Roumani-Denn, and a kind of back door into filmmaking," says Aidem. "Now, whether or not he has caught the bug' remains to be seen."

Whatever happens next, Roumani-Denn can't hide her satisfaction. Of all the many high points in the project, she says, "The one that's the essence was when I realized that Aryeh has gotten what he wanted, that he can now pass it on to his children."

(c) 2007 Investment Dealers' Digest Magazine and SourceMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

<http://www.iddmagazine.com> <http://www.sourcemedia.com>

[Back to IDD This Week](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) [Copyright/Disclaimer](#)



(c) 2007 *Investment Dealers' Digest* and SourceMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.
Use, duplication, or sale of this service, or data contained herein, is strictly prohibited.