>> Shelly Christensen: Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us! I am Shelly Christensen, the Senior Director of Faith Inclusion and Belonging at RespectAbility. I'm also the co-founder of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month. Living with ADHD, I have come to appreciate how much my neurodiversity is a positive force in my life. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a white woman with curly brown hair, and I'm wearing blue glasses, a black sweater over a royal blue top, and behind me are several photographs of flowers, and a tall vase with six red gerbera daisies sitting on a bookcase. Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, may his memory be for blessing, wrote in his book, The Sabbath, "creation, we are taught, is not an act that happened once upon a time, once and forever. The act of bringing the world into existence is a continuous process." As we recognize the 15th anniversary of JDAIM, we pause briefly to recognize the inclusive practices that are now part of the Jewish community. Every February, Jewish organizations and communities, including synagogues, schools, community centers, and federations, have responded to the call to create a world where disabled Jews and those who love us are welcomed and included. Still, to borrow from Heschel, we must allow the process to continue to develop beyond inclusion, until finally, all people who want access to the full scope of Jewish life belong. Lauren Appelbaum is joining me today to co- moderate our panel. Hi Lauren!

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you so much Shelly. As Shelly said, my name is Lauren Appelbaum, and I am RespectAbility's Senior Vice President of Entertainment and News Media. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a white woman with shoulder length brown hair, wearing a navy blue shirt, and behind me is a teal green couch and cabinet. As an individual with an acquired nonapparent disability, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, I work at the intersection of disability employment and the entertainment industry. I oversee our content advisement work and trainings to ensure authentic representation of disability, as well as building the disability community within the entertainment industry through our various Labs. This work helps increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in how society views and values disabled individuals. Based on a true story, THIRTEEN is a short film about a mother fighting to have a Bat Mitzvah for her disabled and terminally ill daughter in a synagogue that refuses to break from tradition. During today's virtual event, we'll explore the intersections of ableism and anti-Semitism, and the ongoing impact in Jewish communities, hearing from members of the team behind the making of THIRTEEN.

>> Shelly Christensen: Now let's introduce the panelists. Allison Norlian is a three-time Emmy-nominated award-winning journalist with a decade of experience in the media. She is the co-founder of BirdMine, a production company that focuses on elevating underrepresented population voices. Through BirdMine, she hopes to tell unheard essential stories about communities who are often left behind in mainstream media and society. Allison is the writer and co-director of THIRTEEN.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Now we can invite Naomi and Judith to also turn their camera on. For Naomi, after falling in love with acting in school musicals, Naomi Rubin began her professional acting career in 2018, when she was cast in a recurring co-star role as "Noelle" on Seasons two and three of the Netflix original series "Atypical." In addition, Naomi played "Audrey" in the 2019 Disney pilot, "The A Girl," as well as appearing in a long form web- commercial for an international online retailer, and Investigation Discovery's "A Stranger Among Us." An LA native who began performing at the age of eight, Naomi is on the autism spectrum, and credits her neurodiverse thinking for the ability to imagine characters and animate their emotional universe. She's unafraid of exploring themes of vulnerability and awkwardness in her work, and is drawn to characters in extreme circumstances. When she's not acting or singing, Naomi can be found volunteering with rescue cats at Perry's Place, obsessing over the Marvel Universe and Broadway musicals, and championing social justice.

>> Shelly Christensen: After spending untold hours in "video village" as the parent of a young actor, Judith was inspired to switch hats after 20 years as a mom and Executive Coach. She recently produced two short films for the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, "Reaching Athena" and "Leap of Love," both of which centered on themes of both external and internalized ableism. Judith is a passionate advocate for autism inclusion and acceptance in the performing arts, as well as Jewish communal life. Welcome. Thanks for joining us! Allison, THIRTEEN is based -- [crosstalk] hi. [laughs] THIRTEEN is based on your family's experience of your sisters BatMitzvah. How did you weave your personal experiences into the narrative of the film?

>> Allison Norlian: Well, I have thought about my sister's Bat Mitzvah really since it happened over two decades ago. You know, my sister's 40 now, so this obviously happened when she was thirteen. And it was really one of my earliest examples of understanding that a person doesn't need to accept the status quo, and can speak up to make change and improve their reality. So it's an important lesson that I wanted to share, which is ultimately why I decided to write THIRTEEN. THIRTEEN's script went through many drafts, as I would argue most screenplays go through. When I first wrote this short film it was very identical to the actual experience, but after sharing it with fellow screenwriters, including my husband, who's a phenomenal screenwriter, I realized that I needed to make some changes in order to what, I guess we call, up the stakes, you know, make it really interesting to the viewer. And what resulted was the narrative, was THIRTEEN: a film that's inspired by my life, but not identical, and -- but that I hope still honors my mom and sister and their story.

>> Shelly Christensen: Mmm. Thank you.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you so much. So this film explores a lot of fun themes, including what it means to be disabled in Jewish spaces. Naomi, as the lead playing Yael, did you draw upon any of your personal experiences when playing this part?

>> Naomi Rubin: So I drew on a lot of parts of my own life. And growing up, my family and I went to a Jewish family camp that was created specifically for families with kids of all kind of disabilities, and amongst those kids and people were non-verbal people, and people who communicated in different ways. And so it was also in a Jewish setting, so being able to draw from those memories was really helpful. And I also -- Allison shared videos of Becky, so that was also what I -- that was also inspiration that I used for Yael.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you.

>> Shelly Christensen: Judith, hi. I'm gonna stay on this topic. What insights on the intersection of disability and Jewish life do you hope our community will come away with after watching this film?

>> Judith Rubin: Well I hope that we all see how far we've come. So this story takes place -- about 20 -- over 20 years ago. And I hope that in Jewish communal life that we've all had the experience of seeing inclusion and seeing a variety of different kinds of B'nai Mitzvot done in a lot of different ways. But the other thing I hope that people see is this vital connection between life cycle events and Jewish identity, and how incredibly important it is both for the participant and the family to have access and to have inclusion in Jewish life cycle events. It's how we identify as Jews, it's how we identify as Jewish parents or siblings, and it's how we see ourselves. So I think the film beautifully shows -- you can really see in Rena Strober's remarkable portrayal of the mother, Leah, in the film -- how much this means to her and her identity and who she is. And you can see what it means to Yael also. You see how important it is to be a part. So I think -- the film draws those connections really beautifully, and I hope people feel that and see it.

>> Shelly Christensen: Thank you.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I love what you just said about how you can see it in Yael, and Naomi, one of the things that I really loved while watching this film was -- yes, you are playing someone who is non-verbal, and so you have to really draw upon a lot of other acting chops and such, and being able to see in like your facial movements and reactions and such to be able to tell a story of what Yael is going through without verbally saying it. And so -- you've had a number of credits to your name, as we mentioned before, from Atypical, to The A Girl, to As We See It. You know, can you share a little bit more about kind of what sparked your interest in acting and desires to play these types of roles?

>> Naomi Rubin: So when I was really really young, I loved -- I loved watching movies -- I still love watching movies and theater, but I would spend a lot of my time just sort of going around the house and pretending and stuff. Like, so much so that sometimes I would just put on costumes. Like, there was a period of time -- I think it was in kindergarten -- when I would like -- when I was at home putting on -- the Judy Garland Dorothy costume and -- just acting out the whole movie around the house.

>> Judith Rubin: Many films when Naomi was little. [crosstalk]

>> Naomi Rubin: That's the one I remember the most. Okay. Anyway -- so I loved just pretending and playing a lot. And so in fourth grade, I was presented with an opportunity to participate in my elementary school's production of Willy Wonka Jr. And I loved Willy Wonka, and I auditioned for Veruca Salt, because I loved Veruca Salt. I still kind of do, which is a controversial opinion. [laughs] And I didn't get the part, but I still got to be in the show because I was like -- I'll do -- I'll still do it, because it means I don't have to do homework as much. And I ended up loving it, and I've been doing -- I've been doing school plays and such ever since. And then 2018 came around, and it was like -- oh, hey, here's this new thing that's falling into your lap, and it's like, yes. [laughs]

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Excellent. It's great to be able to see you making a career of it.

>> Shelly Christensen: Definitely. I love how you just got into roles and acted out entire films, I love that. So let's stick with you for a minute, Naomi, and talk about how does -- how does your neurodiverse thinking and way of being, how does that empower you for your acting career? And along with that, I'm just curious, how did you -- how did that help you prepare, or how did you prepare for the role of Yael?

>> Naomi Rubin: So I -- as an actor on the autism spectrum, I kind of have -- a really -- active and vivid imagination, which sort of allows me to -- imagine myself in the shoes of other characters that I'm playing. And I'm sort of always having -- I'm sort of always creating stories in my head which -- and I'm able to also -- hyperfocus on something, which is really helpful for when I'm practicing -- text work or -- focusing on -- staying with the the actor that I'm playing across from. And being able to put myself in the mindset of someone who doesn't communicate the way that I communicate, and someone who is nonverbal -- it was a really fun challenge to kind of put myself in that -- in those shoes, and -- but also wanting to honor -- who I was playing. And being able to do that was -- something that I really enjoyed, and also just being able to work with Allison was amazing, so.

>> Shelly Christensen: That's great. You just captured that essence of this -- young woman, this thirteen-year-old girl, and how Judaism is so important in her life. That was so -- I just thought it was so beautiful.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Shifting gears, Allison, you know, I've had the opportunity to kind of follow as you've been creating this project -- from an idea to now a finished product. And in advertising the creation of the film when you were -- trying to crowdfund, you wrote, "during a time when anti-Semitism is raging and disability stories are few and far between, THIRTEEN puts Judaism and disability front and center with a heartfelt story based on the writer's life." So, with anti-Semitism in the US on the rise for the past decades, why is it so important to make films that feature authentic Jewish characters, including those who are disabled?

>> Allison Norlian: Yeah -- I think I'm unmuted, right? Yeah, okay, I think that's a great question Lauren, and I think that -- when I think of advocacy, I think there are -- two primary forms of advocacy. You have overt advocacy and you have subtle advocacy. And while I often am very overt in how I speak about disability and Jewish inclusion, I also try to spread awareness, I think, subtly. And I think that that's what THIRTEEN does. When you watch THIRTEEN, you aren't listening to someone explain in a speech or post about why you should care about these two communities. You're just sort of immersed into the world. You're immersed into Jewish life and disability, and what I hope is normalizing both of those things. I think that more filmmakers -- they need to do this. They need to show authentic Jewish and disability life and culture, so both don't seem so foreign, if you will -- for those who are not in these respective communities. So I think subtle advocacy, like creating films featuring authentic Jewish and disabled characters, it helps quote unquote "normalize" our realities in this world. And Lauren, as you said, anti-Semitism has been raging for the last few years, I would argue even more as of late. And I hope people who see THIRTEEN realize the beauty of Jewish life and disability culture, and I hope it helps improve the realities that these two communities face, even if it's just changing one heart and one mind, so.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you.

>> Shelly Christensen: It really -- it's so important to recognize that people come in with so many different identities, and to be Jewish and disabled during this time is something that we talk about a lot at RespectAbility. We talk about -- what does that mean, and how can we support each other in the community, so. Judith, I have a question for you -- and -- actually several questions. One is -- as I'm a parent myself, and I've worn that advocacy hat and I've worn that -- I don't get it, why are you doing this, why are you not allowing my child to -- and Leah -- that's where she's coming from, such passion and such caring. And I was just curious how that felt for you to experience that in the film. And then the film also talks about the important -- really important topics in the disability community -- and one of those is the detriment of Institutions. So why was that important, do you feel, that the film explores these topics?

>> Judith Rubin: You're -- whoops. I'll answer your first question. I want to go back to actually the casting process and talking about the mom. And we saw a number of extraordinary actresses, and it was actually watching those auditions that really -- had me remembering exactly what it feels like when your child's picture is not up on the wall at school, in a "full inclusion classroom," right? And -- all of these -- there's the microaggressions, and macroaggressions that we as parents experience on behalf of our kids and with our kids. So it was -- it took me down memory lane a little bit, certainly, in thinking about that and how important it is to have visibility for your child. So -- and that leads to the other question that you asked which was about -- one of the themes which was around the detriment of Institutions. So look -- we've come very far, and there aren't institutions -- or there are very few institutions. And the film centers on a profoundly autistic young woman, right, a profoundly disabled young woman. And having visibility for everybody -- there is visibility now for -- mild to moderate disabilities, but there's still a lot of segregation into cohorts in all communities of people with profound disabilities. And if we -- if they don't have that -- that visibility, if they aren't visible to the community, we never really have inclusion, right? We never really meet that standard. So we got it that -- institutions and making people invisible and putting -- we've got that, we've understood that, and we've processed it. But I don't think we fully processed what does it mean to really include everybody, and not have -- this cohort that comes in for 15 minutes and says hi to everybody and then leaves. So -- it's not a criticism of our community, it is a kind of a call to action for all communities, and leaders in the disability community too -- that we need a stronger call for equity, especially for people with profound disabilities. And I really loved, personally, that Allison brought this particular story, that she chose this as her first narrative film to tell the story that is very rarely told. I can't -- you can count on one hand the number of films that have been made about people with profound disabilities, so

>> Shelly Christensen: Definitely heard on that. Thank you. And thank you for your advocacy and your work.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I'd like to kind of uplift kind of the second part, maybe Allison, you could kind of touch on it -- that -- it covers so many different important topics, specifically -- institutions and such, and so -- what made you want to add that part into the film of -- that there was a conversation about being in an institution?

>> Allison Norlian: I just -- I think that -- I know that -- if my mom was here, she would talk about how disability inclusion has come a long way, but it wasn't always an inclusive space, whether it be in the Jewish world or non-Jewish world, for people with disabilities, but more specifically people with profoundly disabled disabilities -- people who are profoundly disabled. And when my mom had my sister, if you'd ask her, so many of the comments that she received from the community -- even honestly people in our family was -- actually she told me the story when I was home for the last screening we had that someone in our family -- when my mom had my sister, they said to my mom that Becky was going to be a monkey on her back, and that she should just be institutionalized. So this is what people said 20 plus years ago. And my mother, being the amazing human that she is, said no. This is my daughter, and we are going to include her, and she's not going to be institutionalized, and I mean, my sister -- for me -- and that's why growing up with Becky -- it was just normal life for me. I just saw disability as normal, because I was born into it, and there was no other option. It was just, Becky was my sister, and -- anyway, to piggy back -- to circle back to what you said, I included the institution part, I think, because that was how people for so long perceived what should be done specifically for profoundly disabled people, but I wanted to show the reality that that doesn't -- that that's not the way that you should go and that you can -- people with disabilities and profound disabilities can live beautiful, full lives, and you kind of see the dichotomy of that in THIRTEEN.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Great. I have another question for you Allison, and -- my question is what's next for THIRTEEN? And I wanted to kind of point out we have a question also in the Q&A of "how can I see the film?" "Can I show it to my congregation?"

>> Allison Norlian: Yeah so right now we're doing -- we're hosting private screenings. So actually the next private screening will be in Israel in two weeks, if anyone is joining us from Israel. And -- where I'm going to do a private screening with my family and friends, but then we're hoping to do another private screening in April for Sinai Temple here in Los Angeles. That's where we actually filmed the synagogue exterior -- interiors that you see and the exterior is from Sinai Temple here in LA. We're doing the festival circuit, and so the hope is that through the festival circuit, we will be picked up for wider distribution, but to be determined on -- what's next for THIRTEEN.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I get it, it's always a little bit of uncertainty.

>> Shelly Christensen: Growing pains.

>> Allison Norlian: Yeah.

>> Shelly Christensen: Yes. So I want to invite our members of the audience to ask questions of our wonderful panel. Just put -- drop your questions in the Q&A box. And while we're waiting for questions to come in, I'd like to ask a question for all three of you. And that is what do you hope viewers, Jewish or not Jewish, disabled or not disabled -- what do you hope viewers will take away from watching THIRTEEN?

>> Allison Norlian: You guys want me to go first, or you want to go first? Okay. [laughter] So I'll start off just by saying that -- when I was growing up, I very often do not feel seen or understood. I felt like an outsider in the world, because I'm Jewish, and the product of divorced parents, and have a profoundly disabled sister, and honestly, in the Jewish world because of those latter reasons. And -- when you're growing up -- you're seeking understanding, you're seeking to feel -- you want to feel not alone. But I never saw -- I never saw television or movies that made me feel seen and not alone. And so I became a journalist first, and through my work as a journalist and now a filmmaker, I think what I'm trying to do is -- help or allow people with disabilities and their families, and people -- Jewish people -- to feel seen, to feel less alone in this world, and I think for everyone else, it's -- I hope it's a learning experience for them to understand these two communities a little bit better, and especially with what we're experiencing now in the world, I hope that THIRTEEN allows people to see the beauty of Jewish life and how inclusion does not take away from tradition, but it actually adds to it. And something I often say with -- I've said this since I -- began in journalism, but I hope that even if it's just changing one heart and one mind, I hope that that's the effect THIRTEEN has, so.

>> Shelly Christensen: Thank you. [crosstalk]

>> Judith Rubin: You said it all! She did such a beautiful job, I'm not sure that there's a lot left to say. But -- I hope that -- I hope that people are able to identify with each one of the three main characters in the film, and -- how both ability and disability affect them, and how it drives them and animates who they are. And I think that there is just a really wonderful opportunity with each of those characters to really empathize and understand. I don't want to give too much away, but there's a character who definitely has a very important journey in the film that I hope people center on that because it's really -- David Pevsner -- well everybody was wonderful, I'm not, see, Allison, I'm -- can't be trusted.

>> Naomi Rubin: She's like the Tom Holland of this press tour -- not press tour. [laughter]

>> Shelly Christensen: Naomi, what do you hope people take away from your -- from your performance and from the film?

>> Naomi Rubin: I really hope people see -- that they have not just an open mind after seeing the movie, but I hope they walk away knowing that they saw a story -- a story told by Jewish people about Jewish people, that's not just -- a story that we so -- I feel like we so often see with the Holocaust and -- Jewish tragedy where it's -- Jewish celebration and Jewish milestones and also -- a profoundly disabled Jewish person having -- a hugely important milestone.

>> Shelly Christensen: Jewish pride and Jewish joy.

>> Allison Norlian: I wanna -- if you don't mind if I just piggyback off what Naomi said, we did cast completely authentically for this film. It was really important to us. So every Jewish role was played by a Jewish actor, and then obviously the role inspired by Becky was played by Naomi. So that was a -- huge -- very very important for us, so.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Authentic casting -- across the board is a really important topic, and I'm very glad that this is the case -- that we're able to showcase here. And we have a lot of questions coming in the Q&A, so I hope we'll be able to get to -- all of them. So first for Naomi, it's a comment from Hunter Trost, just saying I want to say congratulations and I'm super excited about getting to see the film and how you brought the story to life. And then a question for you from Marla Bronstein is do you prefer stage or film performance better, and what other kinds of roles are you interested in doing in the future?

>> Naomi Rubin: Well I started out on stage, but I think doing -- there's -- it's a little bit of both -- it -- depends on -- the situation. And so with stage -- you're in front of people but you kind of only get one shot, and if you mess up, you have to -- keep going and find a way. And it's really fun to do that, but it's also -- there are times -- in your head -- is this okay? Is this okay? Is this okay? Is this a train wreck about to go down And then in film -- you have the benefit of -- multiple takes or -- if -- but if you're on a time crunch, it's -- a TV show it's -- okay, really, don't mess this up [laughs] but it's also like, if you mess up it's fine, we'll do another one, but it's also like, don't mess this up. As for what roles I'd love to play, I mean [sighs] I would love to be able to play a role I think -- maybe -- I don't know why a slasher film -- that's like -- where I'm -- the final girl, and -- who -- I don't even -- it doesn't even have to be someone who's disabled or Jewish -- I would just do it -- final girl just sort of being -- surviving and thriving, and having -- I would also love to have -- a role where -- I get to -- kind of be cool, because I feel like I -- not that I don't love playing -- the nerdy kind of girl, but I feel like it would be awesome to -- be someone who's -- cool and yeah.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: I love that. One thing that I was kind of picking up on was that you also want to play characters that aren't -- Autistic or disabled, and I think that that's really important for actors to be able to do and such, and -- to be the final -- girl left in a slasher film -- the survivor -- I can see that and such. This next question I'm actually going to take and ask my co-moderator Shelly if she wants to answer this. This question came in from Madeleine Hutchins, and the question is are there still Jewish communities that don't have inclusive practices around life cycle events?

>> Shelly Christensen: Great question. [laughs] So my work has been centered originally in the Jewish community. I started working in the community 20 -- almost 23 years ago. And Maddie, to answer your question, things are -- things have changed dramatically, positively, and there's a lot more engagement. You know, we tend to think of life life cycle events as Bar and Bat Mitzvah -- and that -- it's really changed in so many ways. Children who have any kind of diagnosis, of course, can and do celebrate that -- celebrate that coming of age in a ceremony. Most often -- and I say this as a former tutor as well, so I tutored for about that long, and I got to work with so many kids. And a lot of times I think that communities are learning that in teaching children, all children, to get to know the child, and to make sure, then, to work with them, and with the parents of the child to make sure that that ceremony is reflective and the study is reflective of the child -- of the kids's strengths and interests and talents. So that has really changed so much. I think that the inclusive practices around life cycle events really do depend, though, on the community. But as a whole, I would say things are much different than ever before. And it's not just about inclusion, it's about belonging. And that is -- that is certainly, as we ascribe to being created, all of us, B'tselem Elohim, in the divine image of God, then it is really incumbent on our institutions and organizations to work together to create pathways to those life cycle events, so.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Thank you. Did any of our panelists wanted to add to that topic? Nope, all right, no worries. We have a lot of of other questions. So this was -- an anonymous attendee asked a question, I believe -- she's asking specifically to you, Allison, about your sister. Is the young woman featured in the film still involved in a Jewish community?

>> Allison Norlian: Yes, I mean, my sister was actually at the JCC on last week -- last Thursday when we screened -- we did a private screening for THIRTEEN for the first time. And yes, so Becky and my mom were there, and my whole family. And so yeah, the answer is yes.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Excellent. And then this is a question for all of you or any of you. Were there any guiding Jewish values that were instructive for you all as creatives in this film making process?

>> Allison Norlian: You guys want to answer first?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: It's a thinking question for sure.

>> Judith Rubin: You can take it.

>> Allison Norlian: What?

>> Judith Rubin: Oh -- did I -- you want to answer, or --

>> Allison Norlian: I'll let you guys go first. I'm still thinking about my answer.

>> Judith Rubin: Okay. I -- really from my own perspective -- I don't know if we will call it a Jewish value but I really wanted authenticity. So -- making sure that that any of the ritual objects were real ritual objects, that people wore kipot when they were in the sanctuary near the Aron Kodesh and that sort of thing, and that we proceeded respectfully in the space at Sinai was really important to me.

>> Naomi Rubin: For me I think it was just -- I don't know why the -- one of the 10 Commandments that came up was -- don't lie, and I guess -- being -- when you're acting, it's -- don't be like -- be honest in your acting, and -- draw from -- a truth that you have, and sort of -- that I guess, yeah.

>> Allison Norlian: For me I don't think it's always a conscious thing, but -- I grew up in a very proud Jewish home, and I think so much of my life has been influenced by that reality. And so -- so many of the actions that I take, whether it's conscious or not, I think is because of the fact that I grew up in that sort of -- in that environment. And so -- yeah -- just piggybacking off what Judith said, I think we were very -- particular and careful in the way that we -- when we were filming in order to be respectful of the space we were in. But it also had to do with language, when it came to -- Judaism and Jewish life and disability. We made sure our cast and crew -- had sheets that explained disability language -- and yeah. And so people, when they were on set, we wanted to have the most inclusive set possible, and also to -- educate in the process. And so that was something else that we did.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: If I may I would also add -- that Judaism values education and teaching others -- you know that that's a huge value. And I think that in the creation of this film -- you'll hopefully be able to educate others, Jews and non-Jews, disabled and non-disabled individuals, and then -- kind of teaching the next generation. I really liked how there was a question of, so what is life like now -- and as Shelly mentioned, there's -- still a lot of hurdles out there, unfortunately. But the importance of kind of teaching folks that may have more access now that, hey, 20 years ago it was even that much harder, and for us to be able to be thankful of individuals who kind of fought the fight then, so there's less of a fight for inclusion now, even though there is still kind of the hurdles that you explore in there. I see another question. This is from Zachary Damon. Do any of you have a moment during filming that surprised you? If so what, and why?

>> Judith Rubin: There's just a -- very beautiful moment of -- that I just didn't anticipate -- of Allison watching the shooting of the final scene of the film, and it was -- it was just sort of like this beautiful, full circle moment watching her watch both her life and her creation at the same time, because the film is -- a creation of hers, it's an artistic creation of hers, but the moment is from her life. And it was very moving. And do you remember when you did? You came and you -- she comforted Allison, yeah -- so.

>> Allison Norlian: Oh yeah -- sorry, I was having trouble unmuting. I mean, to be honest, this was my first narrative film, so the whole thing [laughs] was -- it was exciting, it was new, and yeah. I just -- when I look back on the experience of filming, it was -- I can honestly say that it was one of the most treasured parts of my life. It was just such a rewarding experience to write something, and then create that in -- the vision that I had hoped for, and in honor of the two most important people in my life, which is my mom and my sister. So -- I've always been trying to sort of give back to my mom and my sister, because they have been so influential in -- everything that I've ever done, and I feel like I'd be nothing without them. And so this was sort of a -- being able to create THIRTEEN as my -- as the first narrative film -- my first narrative film, my company's first narrative film, it was just -- it's overwhelming, the joy that it gives me, so.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: It's so nice to see how all three of you are very much personally invested in the film, not just in succeeding, but in its message and such. So we do have some questions about can we show it at my synagogue -- and other things like that, and people are asking -- is there contact information that can be shared? I don't know if there's any sort of BirdMine information that you want to share -- if people want to bring you for a private screening now -- how can -- how can people reach out and contact you for that?

>> Allison Norlian: Yeah so you can -- well also, if you want to -- look up BirdMine -- we're on Instagram, we're on Facebook -- BirdMine Stories. And you can email me at Allison -- with two Ls --at BirdMine.com, and just -- tell me in the subject line -- -- private screening -- right in the subject line, private screening. And THIRTEEN also has an Instagram page that you can follow. We post updates there as we -- we'll probably post about this webinar -- after it's over, so, because we're very appreciative. Thank you RespectAbility for hosting us. This was -- this is really wonderful, and we're really honored to be part of this.

>> Shelly Christensen: Yes, we are honored as well.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: So we -- constantly have more questions coming in which is -- which is great, and we still have about 10 more minutes. Allison, another question for you. What else are you working on, and are these films -- are they also based on Jewish themes, or what other types of topics are you going to focus on?

>> Allison Norlian: So -- we also have -- so my business partner is Cody -- Cody Liebowitz, I think he's on this -- he's on this webinar watching us right now. He and I started BirdMine together and -- our first film actually -- [video and audio freezes] and it's funny, because THIRTEEN was our second film, but it's done -- but it's also disability focused -- oh, did I freeze?

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Yes, you froze for a moment. If you want -- you were just talking about your first film when you froze.

>> Allison Norlian: Okay I'm so -- I'm sorry, I don't -- know why that happened. But -- so our first film is a -- 90 minute documentary, and it's about -- it's disability focused and we're in post- production right now for this film. It's called Meandering Scars and it's about a woman who was actually paralyzed in a domestic violence incident. She spent the better part of two decades with suicidal ideation and depression, and then in 2019, she discovered a nonprofit that helps people with disabilities compete in obstacle course racing. So I'm sure -- I don't know if any of you have heard of the Spartan Races of the world, Tough Mudder -- so the subject of our film started participating in these races and really fell in love -- being able to challenge herself physically really helped her mentally. So then she decided to -- she wanted to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, which is the tallest freestanding mountain in the world, to raise awareness about suicide and mental health struggles in the disability community. And so we followed her for two years leading up to the climb, we followed her up the mountain, we followed her afterwards. And so this is in post production, this is our next film that we hope -- that'll hopefully be done this year. And then we're also both in the process of writing some new narrative films. And my next narrative film -- I broke story with Judith, actually. And it's -- it's actually inspired -- see, I have a lot of -- a lot of things happened in my life, you guys, so you know, I write a lot of things -- inspired by things that have happened to me. But it's -- inspired by my relationship. My father is Israeli, and it's inspired by that relationship and -- what happened on October 7th in Israel. And so yeah, that's -- that's one of the next scripts that I'm writing.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: And Naomi, I know you typically do films with the Easterseals Disability Film Challeng, so Naomi and Judith, are we -- going to see another one from you this May?

>> Naomi Rubin: Yes. [laughs]

>> Judith Rubin: Yes but we can't -- reveal any -- but yeah -- we will be participating and Naomi's also -- Naomi, you want to talk about the Road?

>> Naomi Rubin: Oh, I'm also a member of the Road Theater Company here in Los Angeles. And I'm going to be in -- the next play they're doing called Singularities, and I'm really excited about it.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: When is that play going to be?

>> Naomi Rubin: End of May, early June, not to quote Dear Even Hansen in any way, but -- sorry -- can you tell I'm a theater kid? [laughs] Yeah.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Excellent. And then I know we might have some filmmakers or aspiring filmmakers on here as well. Naomi, I don't know if you want to share a little bit more about -- your experience with the film challenge, because I believe it is still open for folks to register if they want to do their own films. I know you can't share about what your project is but -- about the overall -- experience.

>> Naomi Rubin: So it's a really fun experience. It's a stressful experience, but again, it's a fun experience. So you have to sort of film the -- the maximum run time for -- a film to submit is five minutes, and you have to shoot the film in five days. So -- that's -- shooting and then editing --

>> Judith Rubin: Yes -- right. It's -- a time crunch, it's a time crunch adventure, but it's really -- it's really fun, and anybody can do it. The thing that's great about the film challenge is we all have these now, and anybody can make a film in cinematic mode. And if there's anyone in the audience who is considering making a disability film challenge film, we would highly encourage you to do so. Disability stories need to come from the disability community, and it just does not take much to use that phone and make a film. Just remember -- just has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and this year's theme is Buddy movies.

>> Lauren Appelbaum: Excellent. I know we have quite a few RespectAbility Lab alumni that actively create films as well, so it's always fun to see what new content comes out. We have a lot of Mazel Tovs and congratulations in the Q&A. Reena Strober says Mazel Tov to everyone. This set was the safest, most sacred set I've ever been on. The respect for the story and for Judaism brought us so much closer to the story. And Robert Sherwood says, no question, just to say how proud I am of you, Naomi and Judith, and how much I'm enjoying all of this panel discussion. So lots of thanks from members of the audience. I know it can be hard on Zoom where you're not seeing them and such, so wanted to make sure that you're getting the opportunity to hear that a lot of folks are saying thank you, and how much they're enjoying it. Before I pass it off to Shelly to close us up and -- share some other upcoming things -- are there any last minute remarks from any of our panelists, anything else you are burning to share?

>> Judith Rubin: Just a huge thank you for having us. I know Allison feels the same way, and letting us share the story with the community, and looking forward to everyone being able to see it.

>> Allison Norlian: I'm just really grateful to be here, thank you so much Shelly and Lauren for putting this together, and thank you for everyone who joined us today to hear a little bit about THIRTEEN. And I'm just super excited for everyone to see it and for THIRTEEN to be out in the world, so thanks again.

>> Shelly Christensen: Well we want to thank you so much. We started talking about this webinar a few months ago, and I'm just so happy that we were able to collaborate, which is really -- what we do at RespectAbility all the time. We want to elevate all the remarkable work that's happening in film, in policy, in leadership, and in faith inclusion and belonging. So thank you so much, yasher koach and wishing you just all the success in the world. So this actually -- it is February 28th, this concludes our series that RespectAbility has done this month during Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month. And we've had -- four amazing webinars this month, and they can be found at our RespectAbility events page -- past events, it's at www.respectability.org, and then it'll take you right to the -- screen where you'll find all the past events, you'll be able to watch all of those. Coming up in March, we're really excited to present a webinar focused on resilience -- focused on trauma and PTSD and resilience and hope. And our speaker is John Keesler from University of Indiana, who is such a remarkable speaker. And that is part of our film series with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Religion and Spirituality Interest Network. So very excited and looking forward to that. And Lauren, thank you so much. And thanks to Eric and Ashley and our team at RespectAbility for all the work, all the support. And I also want to thank my partner -- my partner in Faith Inclusion and Belonging, Reverend Ben Bond, who's the other half of our work. So with all that, it's been -- a great experience today. Thank you all so much, and enjoy the rest of your day.