

nice bombs

MY JOURNEY BACK TO IRAQ

An Artvamp & Benzfilm Group Production

Executive Producers William Haddad, Justin Moyer, Studs Terkel

Produced by Kristie Alshaibi, Ben Berkowitz, Ben Redgrave

Distributed by Seventh Art Releasing

Directed by Usama Alshaibi

www.nicebombs.com



Johnathan Rosenbaum, Chicago Reader, Critic's Choice:

"...humanizes the situation on the ground..."



Time Out Chicago:

"It pulls off the rare feat of being 'important' without forcing a political agenda down the audience's throat."



Michael Philips, Chicago Tribune

"...a surprisingly warm first-person video diary...edited with grace and tact."



Anthony Kaufman, IndieWIRE

"Among the many Iraq docs I've seen over the last few years, Usama Alshaibi's 'Nice Bombs' offers a refreshing new perspective... Westerners will likely sympathize with Alshaibi and his family in a much deeper way. Because, after all, he is one of us, too."



NICE BOMBS PRESS KIT

SCREENING INFORMATION

EXACT RUNTIME: *76 minutes*

DATE OF COMPLETION: *April 2006*

COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION: *U S A*

COUNTRIES OF FILMING: *Iraq, Netherlands, U S A*

PRODUCTION BUDGET: *110000 U.S. Dollars*

SHOOTING FORMAT: *MiniDV (NTSC)*

SCREENING FORMATS: *Digibeta (NTSC), or DVD (all regions NTSC)*

SELECTED CREDITS

Director – Usama Alshaibi

Producers – Kristie Alshaibi, Ben Berkowitz, Ben Redgrave

Distribution– Seventh Art Releasing

Executive Producers – William Haddad, Justin Moyer, Studs Terkel

Cinematography – Usama Alshaibi, Kristie Alshaibi

Editors – Amy Cargill, Michael Palmerio, Usama Alshaibi

Music – Naeif Rafeh, Issa Boulos, Omar al-Musfi, Crumpler, Strepsata, Andy Ortmann, G(riot)

Sound Mix – Jacob Ross, Experimental Sound Studio

Color Correction – Bob Sliga

Nice Bombs is a Creative Capital Project, with additional funding from the Playboy Foundation and Tribeca All Access Connects.

SHORT DESCRIPTION

Exploring his dual role as both Iraqi and American, filmmaker Usama Alshaibi documents the lives, voices, and humor of his family in Baghdad.

SYNOPSIS

In Nice Bombs, filmmaker Usama Alshaibi returns to Baghdad to reunite with his family after nearly 24 years. This documentary navigates through his unique relationship to an Iraq that is much different than the country of his childhood.

Usama captures the conflicting reactions to the conditions of life in Baghdad. Through a wide range of opinions and experiences he provides a broad panorama of voices long neglected under Saddam's regime.

His cousin Tareef enters the room upon hearing an explosion. "It's a bomb. A Nice Bomb," he explains. The phrase is indicative of his family's nonchalance about their situation. As one young boy put it, "We're Iraqis. It's normal."

With humor and resilience Nice Bombs explores Usama's dual role as both Iraqi and American.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The sound of a ground-shaking explosion awoke my wife and I from a deep sleep. It was about 7:00 in the morning. My cousin Tareef entered the bedroom to find a tie for work. "What was that?" I asked. "It was a bomb. A nice bomb." The phrase was indicative of my family's nonchalance about their situation. I had been away for twenty-four years. They were used to it. As one young boy put it, "We're Iraqis. It's normal."

My Arabic is weak so I spoke to my relatives in English, both on and off camera. I was surprised that, despite the language barrier, their meaning clearly broke through. I thought that most Iraqis would be reluctant to speak openly. It had been rumored that Saddam executed people for simply making jokes about him and they were accustomed to holding their tongues. The opposite was true. Everyone wanted to speak, and they wanted Americans to hear them.

I left in 1980 in the midst of a war between Iraq and Iran. I was eleven years old and terrified of dying. The current war gave me an opportunity to return and revisit my birthplace and my family, and to explore a culture in which I feel both rooted and uprooted. I was frightened, but I felt that I had to go and see what TV and newspapers could not convey. I brought my camera along to document the experience.

CONTACTS

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Studs Terkel
William Haddad
Justin Moyer

BIOS

Usama Alshaibi: Director, Picture Editor

Usama Alshaibi was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1969. His work in film and video has been screened at numerous film festivals and venues across the United States and abroad. He is the recipient of a generous 2005 grant from the Creative Capital Foundation for the Arts and a Playboy Foundation Award, as well as the winner of the Creative Promise Award at Tribeca All Access in NYC. He has completed one narrative feature titled *Muhammad and Jane*, and more than thirty short films and videos. He has also produced and directed music videos for a variety of recording artists, including Bobby Conn and Panicville. Usama is the founder and Director of the Z Film Festival and film/video curator for specialized screenings that have received critical accolades. As an adjunct professor at Columbia College in Chicago, Alshaibi teaches documentary film classes, and he has lectured as an artist in residence at schools and universities throughout the U.S. In 2004 Usama became co-owner of Artvamp, a multi-media production company founded by his wife Kristie Alshaibi. An interview with Usama appears in Studs Terkel's book Hope Dies Last. Feature articles have been written about his work and he has appeared on a variety of television and radio news programs. Usama and his wife returned to his birthplace in Iraq to shoot his first feature documentary titled *Nice Bombs*, which will be ready for North American distribution in 2007.

Studs Terkel: Historian, Executive Producer

A prize-winning author and radio broadcast personality was born Louis Terkel in New York on May 16, 1912. Terkel attended University of Chicago and received a law degree in 1934. He chose not to pursue a career in law. After a brief stint with the civil service in Washington D.C., he returned to Chicago and worked with the WPA Writers Project in the radio division. In 1952 Terkel began working for WFMT, first with the "Studs Terkel Almanac" and the "Studs Terkel Show," primarily to play music. The interviewing came along by accident. This later became the award-winning "The Studs Terkel Program." His first book, Giants of Jazz, was published in 1956. Ten years later his first book of oral history interviews, Division Street: America, came out. It was followed by a succession of oral history books on the 1930s Depression, World War Two, race relations, working, the American dream, and aging. His latest book, Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and Hunger for a Faith, was published in 2001. Terkel continues to interview people, work on his books, and make public appearances. He is Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the Chicago Historical Society.

Ben Berkowitz & Ben Redgrave, Producers, Benzfilm Group

Ben Berkowitz and Ben Redgrave are graduates of the School of the Art Institute Chicago. In 1998 they formed Benzfilm Group while writing and producing their first feature film *STRAIGHTMAN*. They also co-wrote their current screenplay, *POLISH BAR*, a drama set in Chicago, currently in development with Producer Effie Brown's Duly noted inc. Benzfilm is also producing the upcoming Iraqi documentary *NICE BOMBS* by Director Usama Alshaibi. Their first feature film, *STRAIGHTMAN*, won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Screenplay at Outfest 2000. They also produced *ROCKETS REDGLARE!* (Sundance 2003).

Kristie Alshaibi: Producer, Artvamp

Mrs. Alshaibi works as Program Director of the Z Film Festival (now in it's fifth year) and was the Festival Director for the successful 72 Hour Feature Project. She has attempted to elevate her intimate fascination with the body and multiple identities to the level of art via the mediums of video, film, and the web. In the process, she has received generous grants from such places as the Princess Grace Foundation, and the Film Society of Lincoln Center, as well as a full merit scholarship from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she received her Master's degree in Film and Video in 2001. In the roles of both director and performer her work has been shown in dozens of festivals across the United States and abroad, including major screenings of her short videos at the Chamber of Pop Culture in London. Kristie is the managing partner of Artvamp, LLC, a multimedia design and video production company. As producer, Alshaibi obtained grants for the feature documentary *Nice Bombs* from the Creative Capital Foundation, the Tribeca Film Festival, and the Playboy Foundation in 2005.

Amy Cargill, Editor

Amy Cargill is a video artist living and working in Chicago, Illinois. She studied Film & Video Studies at the University of Oklahoma before settling in Chicago to found Normal Pictures Inc, a media production company. She is finishing the feature documentary *LADIES AND GENTLEMEN*, a film that examines the complex relationship between three transgendered women in a culture of shifting tolerance. Also committed to media reform, Amy is a videographer for Indymedia and has worked with Democracy Now!, Danny Schechter and Global Exchange. She recently began production of *GOD BLESS THE RED KRAYOLA AND ALL WHO SAIL WITH IT*, a feature documentary film following the history of musical outlaws The Red Krayola, a band spanning forty years of dadaist psychedelia.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

USAMA ALSHAIBI

2006

Nice Bombs; DV; color; 91:00

Eid Sacrifice; DV; color; 2:05

Qawliya Dance; video; color; 8:05

2005

The Pill; DV; color; 5:20

Traumata; 16mm film; color; 2:00

2004

The Message; DV; color; 5:45

Bombshell; video; black & white; color; 15:35

Convulsion Expulsion; 35mm film to digital video; color; 6:00

2003

Muhammad and Jane; DV; black and white; 80:00

The Amateurs; DV; color; 49:00

Allahu Akbar; digital; black & white; 5:10

2002

Interview with Studs Terkel; DV; color 70:00

Public Din; DV; color; 8:05

Soak; DV; color; 60:00

2001

Slaughtered Pigtales; DV; color; 2:32

The Green Room; DV; color; 6:15

The Foreigner; DV; color; 15:00

2000

Dogirl; 16mm film; b&w and color; 4:00

Muffin; DV; color; 5:30

The Swimmer; DV; color; 2:15

1999

Dance Habibi Dance; 16mm film; color; 3:45

PRODUCERS' FILMOGRAPHY

BENZFILM GROUP – Ben Berkowitz and Ben Redgrave

2005 – 2006

POLISH BAR: currently in development with Effie T. Brown's DULY NOTED, INC., co-produced by BENZFILM GROUP.

NICE BOMBS: winner TAA CREATIVE PROMISE AWARD for documentary work in progress TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL.

2003

ROCKETS REDGLARE!: SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2003

2000

STRAIGHTMAN: winner BEST SCREENPLAY UTFEST 2000, SPECIAL JURY PRIZE NEWFEST NY 2000

PRODUCER'S FILMOGRAPHY

KRISTIE ALSHAIBI - Artvamp

2006

"Nice Bombs"; DV; FEATURE DOCUMENTARY; producer

2004

"Hold My Scissors; Magic is Küntmaster"; DV: color; 4:17; performer
"Convulsion Expulsion"; 35 mm; color; 6:00; performer

2003

"The Amateurs"; mini DV; 49:00; assistant director, editor, performer

2002

"Other People's Mirrors"; DIGITAL FEATURE; Mini DV; 70 minutes; writer,
director, producer, editor; funded by the Grand Marnier Video Fellowship, and the
Film Society of Lincoln Center, NY
"Soak"; mini DV; 60 minutes; producer, actor, assistant editor

2001

"Slaughtered Pigtails" ; Mini DV; mono sound; 2:40; co-director, co-writer,
producer
"Echo's Dream"; Mini DV; color; mono sound; 3:00; writer, director

2000

"Personal 2000"; Hi8 video; color; stereo sound; 2:00; writer, director, editor,
sound design

1999

"Nelson's Electric Chaircuts"; digital video; color; hifi sound; 8:30; director, editor
"Displaced Artifacts of a Clockwork Self"; Hi8 video and 16 mm film; color; hifi;
16:30; writer, director, editor, sound design; funded by the Princess Grace
Foundation

1998

"Honesty"; 16 mm film/SVHS video; black and white; hifi sound; 5:00; writer,
director, editor, sound design
"Three Minutes in the Memory of Cathexis the Electronic Lover"; SVHS video;
color; hifi sound; 3:30; writer, director, editor, sound design