PRESS KIT

Leaving The Fold
A Documentary Film by Eric R. Scott

Official Web Site
www.leavingthefold.net

Film Trailer
www.leavingthefold.net

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PRODUCED BY BUNBURY FILMS & ONTIC MEDIA
www.leavingthefold.net
| Synopsis |

**LEAVING THE FOLD** is a documentary film, which tells the story of five young people born and raised within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish world who no longer wish to remain on the inside. As children they grew up in a closed society where deviation from the rules of conduct is often punishable by ostracism, intimidation or worse. As young adults they pay a steep price for abandoning their parents and community to seek the freedom to make their own choices.

From the Hasidic enclaves of Montreal, Brooklyn and Jerusalem come stories of conflict, coercion and struggle. Tinged with pain and unexpected humor, **Leaving the Fold** documents the process by which our five heroes emerged from a strictly controlled society into a baffling secular world of endless choices: What should I wear? What shall I become? Who will I marry? Once everything was decided for them. Now they must decide for themselves. But the answers don't always come easily.
## Production Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Title:</th>
<th>Leaving the Fold</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French Title:</td>
<td>Quitter le bercail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director:</td>
<td>Eric R. Scott</td>
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<tr>
<td>Producers:</td>
<td>Frederic Bohbot - Bunbury Films</td>
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<td>Evan Beloff - Ontic Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Original Music:</td>
<td>Basya Schechter</td>
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**Creative Team:**
- **Writer:** Eric R. Scott
- **Director of photography:** Kieran Crilly
- **Editor:** Carl Freed
- **Sound Recordist:** Toby W. Richardson

**Languages:**
- English Version
- French Version (dubbed)

**Country of Origin:** Canada

**Type of Film:** Documentary

**Duration:** 52 minutes / 43 minutes

**Format:** 16:9 HDCAM SR et DigiBeta

**Release Date:** Television Premiere Fall/Winter 2008/2009

Commissioned by La Société Radio Canada (French arm of the CBC - Canadian Broadcasting Corporation)
Leaving the Fold: A Story of Courage

« I crawled out of the fold with a crease across my head that never goes. »

What happens when a person is born a Hassidic Jew, but knows that they don’t belong?

LEAVING THE FOLD is a film, which tells the story of five young people born and raised within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish world who no longer wish to remain on the inside. Tinged with pain and unexpected humor, the film documents the process by which our five heroes emerged from a strictly controlled society into a baffling secular world of endless choices: What should I wear? What shall I become? Who will I marry? Once everything was decided for them. Now they must decide for themselves. But the answers don’t always come easily.

In Montreal the film tells the stories of two brothers LEVI and HUDI. Both form the principal narrative of the documentary. They have chosen to leave the fold and join the secular world that their father, PINCHUS has categorically rejected. Now in his fifties, Pinchus tries to come to terms with the fact that two of his eight children deny the Hasidic faith he so fervently embraces.

While still deeply attached to their father and to their other siblings, Hudi dreams of a career as a chef while the older Levi plays guitar and studies psychology in university. Both love their father dearly but will not embrace the religious restraints of the sect they were born into. They simply cannot find the answers or spiritual comfort their father has found in the Loubavitch Hasidic movement. With tears in his eyes, Pinchus prays each morning for Levi and Hudi to return.

Autumn is the season to celebrate Sukkot, the Jewish feast of Thanksgiving. As tradition requires Levi and Hudi help Pinchus build the traditional wooden hut or “sukka” with an evergreen roof where the family will share festive meals for 9 days. Seated with their father, the boys talk openly about their alienation from the Hasidic world. With astonishing candor rarely seen on film, Pinchus and his sons try to bridge the enormous gap that separates them.
In New York we hear the story of the talented singer-songwriter **BASYA SCHECHTER**. In the Hassidic world any girl who dares to *leave the fold* automatically burns her bridges with her family and her community. Which makes her story all the more remarkable. As a child Basya once dreamed the Biblical eagle had landed in her Hasidic stronghold of Boro Park, New York and carried the pious on its back to the Messiah in Jerusalem. Everyone she knew boarded the eagles’ back. Everyone that is, except her. Basya has since left the security of the ultra-Orthodox world to pursue the precarious career of a singer-songwriter, trying to mesh her religious past with her destiny as a performance artist. For her, it was her artistic sensibilities that pushed her to challenge the ultra-Orthodox community where she was raised. It is not permitted for a woman to sing in public. Female artistic expression is frowned upon as both immodest and sexually charged and any woman who challenges this paradigm risks permanent exclusion.

As a gifted singer-songwriter Basya’s haunting musical score adds immeasurably to the power of LEAVING THE FOLD and underlines both her hope and sadness about the role of a woman’s voice in Hasidim.

Finally it is in Jerusalem, the holy city and heart of the Hassidic world where we meet **Z and SARA**. Two young people with very different tales of why and how they left the fold. At first we meet **Z** who comes from an illustrious dynasty of Hassidic rabbis with branches in New York, London and Jerusalem. Born and raised in New York until the age of 19, he hardly speaks English. He was a gifted student. At an early age, his teachers chose him to lead his fellow students. Less than a year ago he decided to leave the fold. To everyone’s utter shock, he abandoned his wife and two children in the fervently Hasidic Mea Shearim quarter of Jerusalem to seek a new life in the secular world. He describes his first sexual relationship as a rape, as much for him as for his new bride. He struggles finding himself as lost in his new world as he was in his old world.
But where can these outcasts turn for help? Z takes us to a Sabbath meal organized by the Hillel organization, charged with helping others like Z who have chosen to leave the fold. At Hillel we come across SARA LOCK in a storage room filled with clothes. When young people leave, it is often with only the clothes on their back. Here they can find enough used clothing to sustain them during their first steps on the “outside”. Sara tells us about how she left the strictest and most militant Hasidic sect of all. Her elder sister had been caught wearing pants in Mea Shearim. The neighbor who had witness her transgression beat her up with considerable help from the boys of the local yeshiva, or religious college. In the aftermath, hundreds of her ultra-Orthodox neighbors broke down the door of the family apartment and forced the family to leave the neighborhood. It was then that Sara too decided to leave the fold.

Finding the courage to leave the fold is only the beginning for most of these young people. Those who have decided to take this step become pariahs, often completely cut off from the emotional and financial support of their families. To make matters worse, judged by our secular standards, they have no marketable skills. Many only speak Yiddish – or some Hebrew that is stilted and archaic because it is restricted to use only for prayer.

However not all members of the Hasidic movement have turned a blind eye. There is RABBI SNIR BITTON. Snir is a rarity, a holy man and musician - a Loubavitch Rabbi who stands at the vanguard of spiritual outreach in-and-out of the Jewish community. He works in a Montreal community center preaching the virtues of religious piety, all the while using music, Internet and video games as a means of bridging the gap. His non-judgmental interaction, religious allegories and passionate storytelling interspersed throughout the film, emphasizes that all is not lost for those who have left the Hasidic world – and for those who want to return.

Ultimately, LEAVING THE FOLD is a film about complex, spiritual journeys in the opposite direction, from the constraints and the strange beauty of religious fundamentalism inside the Hasidic world to the intoxicating uncertainties of personal freedom of those few who would escape it.
| The People in the Film |

**Montreal, Canada**

LEVI RIVEN

HUDI RIVEN

PINCHUS RIVEN

RABBIN SNIR BITTON

**New York, USA**

BASYA SCHECHTER

**Jerusalem, Israel**

Z

SARA LOCK

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Produced by Bunbury Films & Ontic Media

www.leavingthefold.net
Background Information

Complementary information to put in context the documentary film « Leaving the Fold. »

The reasons young people give for wanting to leave are as individual as the personal circumstances in which they find themselves. Some come from dysfunctional families. Others mention a feeling of being coerced or forced to follow orders, especially on personal matters. In some cases it is the result of dissatisfaction with a life focused exclusively on religious studies.

The vast majority of those attempting to leave the ultra-Orthodox world fall between the ages of 18 and 23. By their mid-twenties most religious men and women are married with children, making an exit virtually impossible. Men overwhelmingly predominate (75%) over the women (25%) who take this drastic step. As in secular society, ultra-religious girls come under more careful scrutiny than the boys. For young girls, the interval between adolescence and adult responsibilities is very, very short. Usually Hasidic or ultra-Orthodox girls are betrothed and married off between the ages of 17 and 19. Unlike the boys, they have less opportunity to initiate friendships beyond their closed circle and have even less opportunity to rebel, trapped in an unending cycle of pregnancies.

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The Creative Team (Bios)

**Eric Scott**

**WRITER / DIRECTOR**

Eric Scott has been working in television and documentary film production since the early 1980s. *Je me souviens* was completed in 2001 and is a controversial documentary about anti-Semitism and extreme right wing nationalism in Quebec during the 1930s and early 1940s. In 2004, Scott completed *The Other Zionists*, a documentary about the women of Checkpoint Watch, an organization of Israeli women who defend the human rights of Palestinians crossing Israeli military checkpoints. After broadcasts in Canada and overseas on international TV5 network, the film was purchased and aired by RTÉ, Ireland’s national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the US DOC Channel and Spain's Odesia network. *Leaving the Fold* is his third film.

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**Frederic Bohbot**

**PRODUCER**

Frederic Bohbot founded Bunbury Films in 2002 with the express purpose of producing and directing one film: *Once a Nazi*...(2006 – Canal D) 2006 was a year of emergence for Bunbury Films with the production of *Bigfoot’s Reflection* (SPACE May 2007), and *Leaving the Fold* (Radio Canada 2008). Currently Bunbury Films is producing a new documentary for the CBC and has numerous new projects in development.
| The Creative Team (Bios) |

**Evan Beloff**

**PRODUCER**


**Kieran Crilly**

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Kieran is a Montreal-based cinematographer whose credits include documentaries for the CBC and Space Channel, as well as the Vice web channel VBS. His narrative credits include the musical short film *Perfect Harmony* and 2nd Unit DP work and Producer on the independent feature film *Who Is KK Downey?* and 2nd Unit Cinematography for the IFC original series *The Business.*
The Creative Team (Bios)

Carl Freed
EDITOR

Carl Freed is a filmmaker working in Montreal. He has edited and/or co-directed over 50 hours of series and documentary television. Carl's focus has been documentary-based programs, including the Gemini nominated and internationally acclaimed series, Mystery Hunters II. Most recently, Carl has focused on editing long-form documentary films, including the NFB feature Club Native, (premiered Hot Docs 2008) won Best Canadian Documentary Doxa Film Festival in Vancouver. As a filmmaker, Carl is currently working on Teen Spirits, a cinema-vérité documentary shot over a period of 5 years, following the lives of 3 teens in the alternative school system. Continuing his relationship with Bunbury Films, Carl's next project will be a documentary on the left-handed experience.

Basya Schechter
MUSIC

Basya Schechter is the founder of the Neo-Hasidic, internationally touring world music band, Pharaoh's Daughter, which fuses influences from both Askenazi and Sephardic musical traditions, as well as Malian, Turkish, psychedelic rock and Persian styles. She has recorded five albums, with her most recent recording, "Haran," being released in Spring 2007. She is now working on a collection of songs written to the Yiddish poetry of Abraham Joshua Heschel, as well as a new Prayer Project and Song of Songs project.
| The Creative Team (Bios)

**Toby W. Richardson**

**SOUND RECORDIST**

Based in Montreal, Toby Will Richardson is a Location Sound Mixer/Boom operator, as well a musician/composer who scored the 2006 Bunbury Films/ Ontic Media documentaries *Once A Nazi...* and *Bigfoot’s Reflection* in 2007 for Space Channel (for which he was also credited with Location Sound). His drama credits as sound recordist include: the iThentic/NFB short by Malcolm Clarke *The Dirty Trick*; Tracey Deer’s fictional debut *Escape Hatch* (post-production), and Nicolas Wright’s Super 16mm teaser/ trailer, *Dieter Horn: Night Port.*
The Production Companies

**Bunbury Films Inc**

[www.bunburyfilms.com](http://www.bunburyfilms.com)

Founded by Frederic Bohbot in 2002, the company's objective is to produce high quality entertainment in both fiction and non-fiction film as well as corporate and music videos. The company is currently focusing on producing thought provoking documentaries for the international television market.

**Ontic Media**

[www.onticmedia.com](http://www.onticmedia.com)

In 2005 after seven years of partnership in the Montréal film house Diversus Productions, Beloff relinquished ownership in order to establish his own company Ontic Media Inc. He has since written, directed and produced (in collaboration with Bunbury's Frederic Bohbot) several, award-winning and cutting-edge documentaries.

*Made with the generous financial support of …*