Even in a global pandemic, the nonprofit United Nations Association Film Festival endures, presenting entirely online this year (its 23rd) a program of 60 documentaries over 11 days, beginning Oct. 15. UNAFF Founder and Executive Director Jasmina Bojic continues to think globally and act locally with this year’s array of offerings, including several films with a local connection as well as opportunities for discussion and networking via Zoom panels, salons, and outreach to schools and libraries, kids, seniors and veterans.

In a useful change, films will be available to screen any time during the day on which they’re scheduled. Organizers hope that flexibility will also encourage festivalgoers to digitally mosey over to the fest’s daily 6 p.m. Zoom sessions, where filmmakers and their subjects, as well as other special guests, will mingle amongst audience members for a combination of the day’s highlights, QA and informal chit chat.

Of course, the real draw of the festival remains the films themselves. UNAFF 2020 — with its theme “The Power of Empathy” — covers ground ranging from A to V, Afghanistan to Venezuela. For a subject that’s close to home, virtual attendees can begin with any of three films that profile area teaching professionals in “Why Doctors Write: Finding Humanity in Medicine,” a half-hour short examining the role of empathy on a time-travel trip to a clinical care.

“The story of Cubberley High School’s infamous “Third Wave” lesson gets a fresh retelling in “The Invisible Line: America’s Nazi Experiment.”

The oft-told story of Cubberley octogenarian recounting how she recognized the beloved yoga teacher of “Lolly Font, Yoga Rebel.” This 14-minute short from director Liz Cane finds the cheery and spry octogenarian recounting how she discovered yoga at Big Sur’s Esalen Institute and how she subsequently became “married to yoga” for life. To supplement the interview with Font, Cane talks with the teacher’s starry-eyed pupils and takes us inside Font’s yoga studio to audit her class.

With her 4-minute, 16mm black-and-white tone poem “Susana,” produced in Stanford’s documentary film M.F.A. program, Laura Gamse artfully examines the impact of ICE on the immigrant community as well as the determination of one woman to protect the vulnerable. Former slaughterhouse worker Susana returns to her erstwhile workplace — the American job site most frequently targeted by ICE — as she follows her heart (and sets an example for her teenage daughter) by protesting animal abuse and slaughter. UNAFF 2020 also features Palo Alto medical professionals in “Why Doctors Write: Finding Humanity in Medicine,” a half-hour short examining the push to use writing as a tool of support and communication in clinical care.

The fest’s most high-profile selection this year takes its message of empathy on a time-travel trip to the 1960s. Judith Ehrlich’s “The Boys Who Said NO!” — presented in collaboration with the Mill Valley Film Festival — concerns anti-Vietnam War activists, serving as a brief history of the government’s war strategies overseas and at home but more so as a humanizing account of conscientious objectors and the various forms resistance took: passive-resistance protest (including burning draft cards) as well as more aggressive activism (The Weather Underground, destroying government files). Prominently featured are Woodside resident and folk-music icon Joan Baez, whose presence on the scene kept spirits high by words and music, and her then-husband David Harris, who served a federal prison stretch for draft resistance that largely kept him apart from Baez and their newborn child.

Baez will be honored with this year’s UNAFF Visionary Award, and a laborious way for dedicated organizers — never more so than during our current moment of multiple national crises. UNAFF is a Peninsula institution: use it or lose it. Losing it will leave us sitting in the dark, with only the memory of the projectors that used to help us see the light.

For ticket, schedule and access information, go to unaff.org.

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