

BBC film helps four youngsters celebrate

BY SIMON YAFFE

ROSEMARY Baker's new documentary was in late development when Hamas carried out its terrorist attacks on October 7.

Growing Up Jewish, which will be screened on BBC One on Wednesday (10.40pm), shows four Jewish youngsters preparing for their bar and batmitzvahs.

Rosemary, of True Vision Productions, explained: "It made the film so much more delicate to make.

"There has probably never been a harder time for Jewish people, so the families had to think carefully about whether they still wanted to take part, and share their and their children's lives publicly.

"Although the film was not about the (Israel-Gaza) war, we do acknowledge it, which came about after conversations with the BBC and with the families."

The documentary follows Dylan, Ayala, Talia and Eve as they mark their transitions to adulthood within the Jewish faith.

Eve's mum is a secular Jew and her dad is atheist. Although she was raised in a non-religious household, she decided to have a batmitzvah to connect with her heritage.

Dylan and his family attend



CELEBRATIONS: Ayala and Dylan

the same synagogue as Eve, after moving away from the modern Orthodox Jewish community.

They felt the more liberal approach of Reform Judaism was more in line with their beliefs.

For Sephardi Ayala, the daughter of a senior Orthodox rabbi who has just joined a new synagogue, her batmitzvah is a chance for her family to settle in.

Talia, the youngest of four siblings, is looking forward to a big party to celebrate.

However, after studying the

Torah, she has been drawn to the commandments about charitable giving, and she is keen to also explore ways she can use her batmitzvah as an opportunity to give back.

The documentary was made by a mixed team — Jon Blair (co-executive producer), Einav Leshetz Lovatt (editor), Tilly Wax (shooting assistant producer) and James Gilmore (assistant producer) are all Jewish, while producer-director Rosemary and co-executive producer Brian

Woods are not.

Rosemary and her team found the documentary's subjects after contacting synagogues and Jewish organisations, as well as party planners, rabbis, caterers and DJs.

All the children are based in southern England.

Rosemary said: "I am not Jewish, but have good friends who are Jewish and I have been to the odd seder.

"I think of myself as a fairly cosmopolitan person, so I found making the film to be a valuable and moving educational experience.

"With any film you are making, you try and make yourself an expert in the subject matter by reading books, talking to people and absorbing as much information on the subject as possible.

"These families invited me into their world and showed me how it all worked close-up. It was enlightening.

"I am enormously grateful to everyone and, hopefully, we have got everything right."

While October 7 is not its focus, the film shows barmitzvah boy Dylan talking about it in his Dvar Torah.

"It felt really important to show the kids in the film as ordinary teenagers because that is what they are," Rosemary explained.

"It opens by showing Dylan dis-



ENLIGHTENING: Rosemary Barker

cussing what GCSEs he is going to take and saying that he wants Arsenal to win the league.

"He is just like many school boys, except he has an amazing thing to look forward to which will connect him to his faith and culture."

Rosemary also learned a lot from making *Growing Up Jewish*.

"As a non-Jew, I had in my mind a certain idea of what a barmitzvah or batmitzvah looked like," she said.

"What I didn't know — and learned about — was the difference between Orthodox and Masorti and everything in between, as well as Ashkenazim and Sephardim.

"No two celebrations are the same, which was really fascinating for me.

"We focus on four families who are arranging barmitzvahs or batmitzvahs, but in completely different ways."