



Documentary Trailer: Elián 2:05



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Elián, the film about an epic custody battle, makes its Miami debut May 31

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Elián, a documentary about a custody battle over a Cuban boy that tore the Miami community apart 17 years ago, will be screened at the Tower Theater in Little Havana at the end of the month.

The story of a boy caught between two worlds — and the ensuing tug-of-war between his father in Cuba who fought for his return and his Miami relatives who wanted to raise him in the United States after his mother drowned at sea while trying to reach U.S. shores — will be a special presentation of the Miami Film Festival.

The film, which will be screened at 7 p.m. on May 31, will be followed by a panel discussion on the tumultuous events of 1999-2000 that eventually led to Elián González's return to Cuba. The documentary's theatrical run begins June 2 at O Cinema in Miami Beach and Cinema Paradiso in Hollywood.

“We encourage open conversation on the story at [the film’s] center, one that has made a profound impact on our community,” the Miami Film Festival said in its announcement of the special presentation. The documentary also will air on CNN later this year.

The panel discussion will feature Tim Golden, the writer and co-director of the film; Silvia Iriondo, president of Mothers and Women against Repression and one of many community activists who maintained a vigil outside the Little Havana home of González's relatives, and Nancy Ancrum, who heads the Miami Herald editorial board.

Jaie Laplante, executive director of Miami Dade College's Miami Film Festival, will moderate.







Since the film debuted April 21 at New York's Tribeca Film Festival, it's been making the rounds at various film festivals. It isn't a part of the Miami Film Festival, which will be held March 9-18, but rather a special presentation.

General admission tickets are available at the festival website for \$13. Admission for seniors, students and veterans is \$10.

The epic custody battle began on Thanksgiving Day 1999 after two local fishermen plucked González, then 5, from the ocean after his mother, Elizabeth Brotons Rodríguez, perished at sea with 10 other Cubans when the small boat they used to flee Cuba sank.

Soon it became far more than a family struggle. For many in the exile community, it came to symbolize their own search for freedom and a way to honor a dead mother's wishes. For others, it was a case of a father's right to raise his son as he wanted — away from the 24-hour glare of television cameras and well wishers who beat a path to the modest home of his great uncles and his cousin.

At the beginning of the film, the narrator says: "This is a story of a little boy from Cuba whose mother died bringing him to freedom in the United States. Or maybe it's the story of a boy shipwrecked in Miami whose Cuban father just wanted him back. It was always supposed to be Elián's story — although a lot of other people would try to make it their own."



Elián González, now 23, answers questions from filmmakers.

Courtesy

In addition to interviewing Elián, now 23, and his father, Juan Miguel González, in Cuba, the filmmakers interviewed Marisleysis González, Elián's cousin. At 21, she was thrust into the role of the boy's mother figure but since that time, when the media spotlight glowed so brightly, she has shied away from publicity.

Other key figures in the custody negotiations that stretched from Miami to Havana to Washington are interviewed, and archival news footage — some of it never seen before — that shows how the saga played out on both sides of the Florida Straits is especially revealing in hindsight.

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Juan Miguel González holds his son Elián after a reunion at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., on April 22, 2000. Seized by armed agents before dawn, the boy was reunited with his father after a frantic and forceful end to a five-month standoff between the government and the Cuban boy's Miami relatives. **AP** - Courtesy of Juan Miguel González

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