

FAMILY AFFAIR - DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I first started this project, I didn't know I was making a "documentary," it felt more like I was lawyering with a camcorder: gathering eyewitness testimony, preparing evidence and arguments to present later at trial. I wanted to playback for my sisters how every time we got together, the cordial conversations and light banter inevitably digressed into sorrowful accounts of a troubled past. I wanted to redirect their rage toward our father.

In 2002, my sisters invited me to spend Thanksgiving with them in Kentucky. It was only after I arrived that I learned my father would be there. I hadn't seen him since severing ties 15 years prior. As he walked through the door, I watched my sisters, their children and neighbors warmly greet him. They laughed at his pithy remarks and catered to his every need. It was absurd. Disturbing. And rather than indict him, as I had practiced in my mind a thousand times, I was reduced to a terrified child, hiding behind my camcorder. All I could muster up the courage to say is, "Hey, how are you?" as he walked toward me and filled the frame. I felt like a coward.

After returning to Boston, I was ashamed at my lack of bravery, at my failure to challenge my father and rally my sisters and neighbors behind me. In time, I came to discover that *this* was the story -- the part no one talks about when it comes to incest and families in crisis. Why were my sisters and others accommodating this man, who did these terrible things? The way I'd always seen child molestation presented in the media was much cleaner: The abuse is brought to light, then the abuser and victim-survivor go their separate ways -- the abuser banished to the margins of society, the victim-survivor left to recover. Never did the two voluntarily reunite and forge a seemingly "normal" father-daughter relationship.

Filming took a toll on me both physically and emotionally. To sit with my father and listen to his opinions was difficult, but necessary. I feared that he retained control over me and this project. As a key subject in the film, he possessed the power to derail it simply by saying, "I don't wish to participate." He could opt to not sign a release form, demand I turn off the camera, or simply ask me to leave. The discomfort of having to sit in my father's presence, absorb the gravity of my sisters' experience and document my mother's long absence -- the emotional impact of it all wouldn't quite sink in until I returned home and began to sit with the footage. It was only then that the truth of this story -- my story -- dug its way into my soul, often shutting me down for days.

As I increasingly spent less time teaching and more of my time dedicated to this project, people would ask, "So what's your film about?" A seemingly innocuous question that I had difficulty answering. As I danced around the subject, searching for the right words to talk about this taboo -- this terrible thing that's not suppose to happen, but in fact does, I'd watch people recoil, change the subject or simply walk away. In time, the gradual support of key funders and well respected members of the film community not only lent credibility to the project, but gave people, myself included, permission to talk more openly about the troubled complexities of family.

Inevitably, some will reduce FAMILY AFFAIR to an “incest” film. Clearly that crime lies at the heart of this project, but I chose to make a film that does not solely define my sisters by the worst act that happened to them as girls. Their story should resonate with anyone who’s found him- or herself making accommodations for a parent, who was abusive, neglectful or harmful in some way. I meet a number of people after screenings who say that, although they weren’t molested as a child, they have painful memories of a parent who was an alcoholic, verbally abusive, self-absorbed, cheated on their mother, or committed some act of betrayal, and that today they find themselves still struggling with their past. Mostly, they say, that’s because they find themselves complicit in creating the illusion of a happy, healthy, cohesive family. Exploring that complicity, as much as exposing the original crimes my father committed, became my intent in making this deeply personal film.

– Chico David Colvard

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Please visit www.c-linefilms.com to read a full synopsis and view clips of the film.