



Courtesy of Linda Brown | Filmmaker Linda Brown with a scene from "You See Me" on the screen.

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Linda Brown's documentary 'You See Me' is at its core a love story

By Tracy Rasmussen

It is the truth in Linda Brown's film that makes it so heartbreaking.

But it is also the truth that begins to mend those hearts.

"You See Me," Brown's documentary about how she and her family lived through her father's stroke, will be shown at the ReadingFilmFEST Saturday at 5:30 p.m. at the GoggleWorks Film Theater. The film will be followed by a Q & A with Brown and several others in the film, including her mother, Natalie, whose interviews are both direct and poignant.

Brown has been making films for most of her life, beginning as a child in Reading, when her sister would drive the car and she'd film things out the window. She loved the home movies that her dad shot and grew to want to make movies as a living. She is the head of cinematography at the USC School of Cinematic Arts and has made several movies, including "Your Favorite," which was also about her father.

Brown was raised in Berks County, and her mother and siblings still live here. Her father died here.

Told through family movies and interviews, the movie not only documents the last two years of her father's life, but also shows how tenaciously people cling to their family roles, even in the light of a new and difficult reality. Once shattered, a family system will yield a new way of looking at things or cut deeper wounds.

In Stanley Brown's family, it was a little of both.

But that's not why Linda Brown set out to make this movie.

"I never really thought, oh I'm going to make a film about this," said Brown, who was raised in Reading and graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1968. "My dad had a stroke in 2004, and I think I just picked up the camera because I didn't know what else to do. I was living here in L.A., and I'd fly back and forth to help my parents out. I thought, I'm going to document this because it kept me occupied."

But once she started filming she noticed a shift in family dynamics. So she just kept filming even when he was home from rehab. Stan died in 2006, and finally Brown put the camera down, only to pick it back up again a few years later.

"I had all this footage about my dad," she said. "And I worried that I'd look at it and it would be bad home movies, or that I would start grieving again. Or, and this was probably my greatest fear, what if I had to make the film."

The latter turned out to be true, so she set to work. It took some eight years for the film to be finished to her satisfaction, and she hired an editor to help hone the story as well as the hours of footage.

"There were too many stories," she said.

But the one that is finally culled and presented is universal and poignant. "You See Me" is ultimately a love story. Sometimes unrequited and sometimes ignored, but at its core a story of love.

That's what Brown hopes her father would have taken from it.

"My goal would have been that he would finally realize that he was loved," she said. "We all need that. He had a lot of elements working against him. There were just too many deep formative parts of his life that he couldn't overcome them all."

Brown, a Daddy's girl and tomboy from the start, said all of the children felt loved, and it comes through in the film that their love helped to mask the abuse and deception that was occurring in the family.

Once Stan was nearly incapacitated and fragile, he was unable to be the strong arm that he had been and instead began to express himself - and not always in ways that his family appreciated.

"It deals with a lot of topics that many families experience," she said. "It can be anything from domestic violence to a parent who is difficult to, as in my father's case, things in his background that were pretty shameful."

It's that last part where Brown hopes to make the biggest difference.

"We need to share those secrets," she said. "If this only makes people talk about their family secrets and feel less shame about them, I've done my job."

Brown has done her job as a filmmaker as evidenced by the support she's gotten for the documentary. The American Heart Association is interested in showcasing the film, and it was requested by an International Film Festival in South Korea that was also screening festival darlings like "The Hunting Ground" and "Grandma."

"I was really proud of that," she said. "When I first started sending it around I got a lot of rejections. But then it started to turn around."

Brown said her family approved of the final cut with all of its hard truths and deeply personal content.

"Somebody asked was it hard to do such a personal film," she said. "But really, the more personal, the more universal."

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If you go

What: Screening of the documentary "You See Me," directed by Linda Brown, as part of the ReadingFilmFEST.

When: Saturday, 5:30 p.m.

Where: GoggleWorks Film Theatre, 201 Washington St.

FYI: The film will be followed by a Q & A with Brown and several others in the film, including her mother, Natalie.

Tickets: All-festival pass, early bird \$35, at the door \$50; day passes, include all events and films of day. Friday \$20, Saturday \$30, Sunday \$20; individual panel/film tickets \$8 advance/\$10 at door; student all-festival pass (does not include opening reception)\$25 (student ID required).

For more information: visit readingfilmfest.com.