



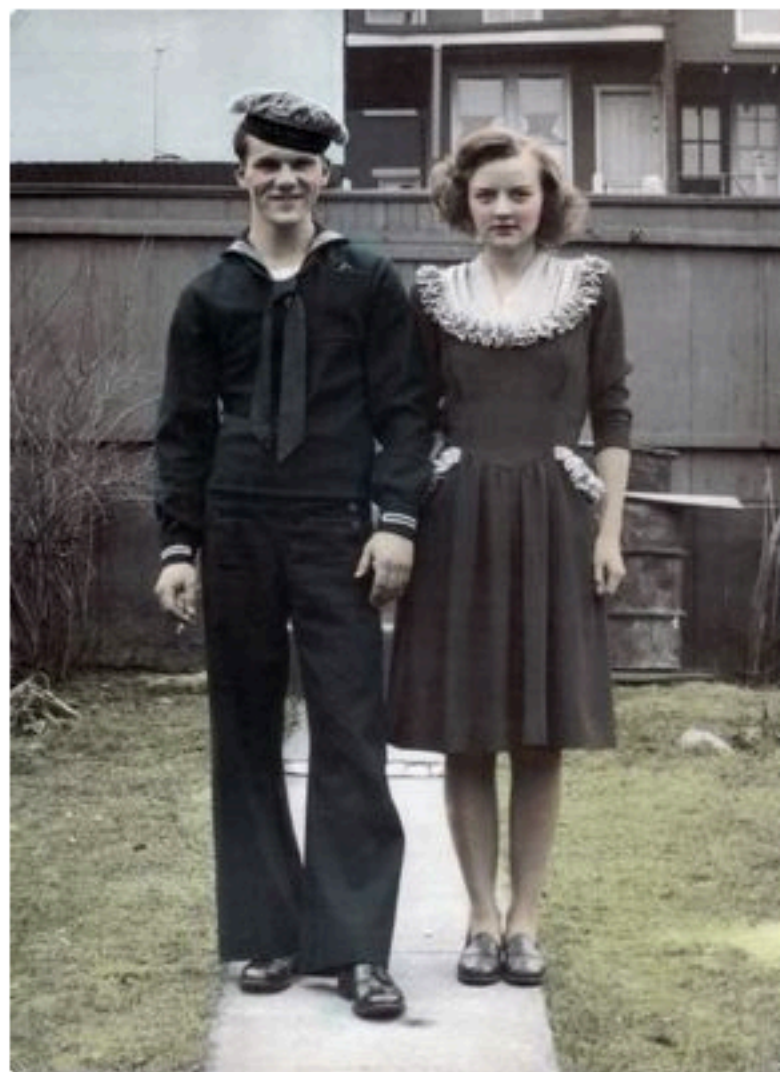
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HOME

LIFE



Courtesy of Linda Brown | Natalie and Stanley Brown in 1945, in a scene from "You See Me."

Film review: Documentary 'You See Me' deftly portrays difficult human truths

READING, PA — A family secret is a giant petri dish. The unspoken, a past kept hidden and other prisoners of memory grow like bacteria. What begins as something held so close to the heart that it suffocates its owner can fester into a terminal illness.

Reading native Linda J. Brown knows about the dark lacunae in the lives of families. In her latest documentary, "You See Me," Brown finds meaning, even tenderness, amid the trials her family endures when her father, Stanley, suffers a stroke. Once independent, "big, bold and bossy," as Brown, who narrates her film, puts it, Stanley is reduced to a needy, sometimes whining child.

The reasons for Stanley's behavior, before and after the stroke, form subtexts of Brown's engrossing, despairing film. Dealing with the aftermath of Stanley's stroke is relatively easy for a family that has withstood years of abuse from a proud, stubborn and confused man, whose capacity for love was stifled by the circumstances of his birth and upbringing.

The filmmaker's purposeful and judicious use of home movie clips prevents "You See Me" from being merely a filmed

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"You See Me"

Produced and directed by: Linda J. Brown

Starring: the Brown family (Stanley, Natalie, Sue, Linda, Nancy and Paul)

Running time: 72 minutes

Festival showtime: Saturday, 5:30 p.m., at the GoggleWorks Theater, 201 Washington St.

scrapbook. Each snippet reveals something: if not answers to Stanley's silent anguish, then tantalizing clues to the dark mysteries tucked away in his emotional attic.

Brown, who teaches at the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, deftly braids interviews with family members among the home movie excerpts. Her mother, Natalie, emerges as the family's Gibraltar. She endures with stoicism and grace Stanley's insults, his jealousy over imaginary boyfriends and his gradual mental decline. Yet she's with him until the final melodramatic scene over the phone, when love seems as unattainable as his recovery.

With its moments of urgency and tension, "You See Me" portrays difficult human truths as urgently as a feature film. Brown's editing nimbly mixes past and present so that each illuminates the other.

Children shriek "Look at me, look at me" when they romp before an adoring family. Without a father he knew and a mother who didn't love him, Stanley lived a life asking from his depths that people look at him. In one scene from a family trip to Little Rock, Ark., Stanley exclaims, "You're supposed to be taking pictures of me not of the mountains."

Linda Brown and her camera take one last, loving look at a man who never knew who he was but realized he had obligations to a family who needed him. Love didn't come easily for Stanley Brown, yet he loved his family as deeply as he could, in his own imperfect way.

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