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On Film and Digital Media

You See Me

Rick J. Scheidt, PhD

School of Family Studies and Human Services, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506; E-mail: rscheidt@ksu.edu

Decision Editor: Helen Q. Kivnick, PhD

Video: *You See Me* (112 min).

Director, Producer, and Photographer: Linda J. Brown

Available for Purchase: Summer 2016

<http://youseememovie.com/join-our-email-list/> or <https://www.facebook.com/YouSeeMeFilm>

Release Date: May 2015

The premise of this interesting and multilayered film is revealed at the outset: Videographer Linda Brown created *You See Me* (<http://youseememovie.com/>) in hopes of achieving a better understanding of her father, Stanley Brown, a man she loved but “wonder if I ever really knew.” This is not a fresh journey for Linda; she admits that despite struggling for years to understand him, she “never really figured him out.” Like Linda, many adults share a sustained interest in learning more about their mothers or



Figure 1. Natalie and Stanley Brown.

fathers as *individuals*—beyond the censorship and camouflage oftentimes imposed but never removed in performance of their parental roles. *You See Me* has much to offer those who share a similar motive within their own lives. It has equal relevance as a unique video case study, revealing a dysfunctional family scenario containing sad and potentially tragic forces that prevent a full and open expression of love between parents and children. *You See Me* is also an extremely courageous film. Linda Brown openly shares her hopes, fears, grief, and pain along her path to understanding. Like the viewer, she is uncertain where or how her exploration will end—until its ultimate redeeming resolution.

You See Me is framed at the outset by a telephone call Linda receives with news that Stanley Brown, her elderly father, has been hospitalized due to a severe stroke; it concludes with his death, several months later. She explains that “my relationship with Dad was always deep and natural, also quiet and unspoken – it was doing things together than connected us. Although we were close, I struggled for years to understand him. Now, with the threat of his failing health, I needed to try once again.” At this early point in the film, viewers will likely ask “who *is* Stanley Brown?” as a parent, as a spouse, as a man. What contributed to the blank spot Linda senses within him and within their relationship?

Linda begins her renewed search for answers by viewing family films and videos. This includes revisiting an earlier (1984) film she made about their relationship titled *Your Favorite* in which “I was trying to get my dad to tell me he loved me.” These films reveal a Stanley that Linda remembers as “big, bold, and bossy.” She interviews family

members about their feelings and history with Stanley. Her mom, Natalie, notes she was attracted by the youthful, strong-willed Stanley—"he knew what he wanted and I guess that was me." *You See Me* intersperses this robust Stanley with scenes of his home coming after 6 weeks of rehab. He has changed. The cerebellum stroke has hampered his movement, speech, and vision. Doctors assure the family that his personality should not be affected. Linda describes him as the "same man – tenacious and stubborn," though he is now incontinent and dependent on his family for help. This contrast leads Linda to reveal a troubling characteristic of her father: "It was shocking to see him so weak, so powerless. But I understood how he felt. You see, we used to be the ones at his mercy when he got moody or mad. It's still hard for me to say but he was abusive with me, my siblings, and my Mom. There's a 'code of silence' around the abuse. Even kids know – you don't betray a parent. So we never talked about the violence. So I thought it was time to start."

Linda openly discusses this abuse with her sibs and Natalie. Her sister Sue fails to remember that she once told Linda it was their role to protect her mother from Stanley's abuse. Another sister, Nancy, recalls that her father grabbed her around her neck when she was a teenager, producing embarrassing fingermarks that caused her to skip school the following day. Her brother Paul remembers that his father had responses that were "out of proportion to the issues at hand" due to his internal anger: "When things couldn't go his way, it was like the wrath of the Lord." Linda narrates over video footage showing all of the children lounging peacefully on the lawn: "I've always liked this footage. We look so normal and happy. All smiles and propriety, masking our private shame." She approaches Natalie about how she coped with Stanley's "moods of anger." Natalie admits she developed an attitude of acceptance because she knew she could not "correct it," did not know where to turn, and had no source of income to support the children: "I think it hurt more seeing the children abused than it did me. It confused them and hurt them, I'm sure." Why did she not do more? "Sometimes you don't know. The answer is *I don't know*."

Speaking with difficulty, Stanley expresses his thanks to the family for bringing him home. He is more attentive, more concerned about Natalie's ability to care for him, and expresses his love for her. His doctor thinks his emotional state is "charged due to circumstances arising from his dependence." An excerpt from *Your Favorite* is inserted here; we see Stanley discussing his avoidance in dealing with emotional issues: "I just used to let it pass. I never psychoanalyzed myself to ask why I was that type of person. I don't know. It's pretty hard to say." Linda wonders if the stroke has made him a new man, different

from "that type of person." We learn that his mother became pregnant at age 19, remaining single until he was 6 years old. He never knew his biological father. Natalie shares that Stanley's mother treated him like a "badge of shame." At one point, Stanley tells the family "I wish I could have a baby, to feel what a mother's love feels like for her child." In a misstep, the family take him to visit his mother, who resides in a nursing home. It is a truly impaired meeting, especially given the brain-related disease that both suffer. Stanley's mother thinks he is a worker in the facility. She is upset and rejecting when he touches her lightly on her leg: "Don't touch me!" This scene stirs sympathy for Stanley. Although it does not excuse his violence, the viewer is now more aware of the reasons behind Stanley's "moods of anger," his violent behavior, and his fractured ability to express unconditional love toward his children.

The last segment of *You See Me* shows a reversal of Stanley's recent gentleness. Over time, he grows more quarrelsome, frightened, paranoid, volatile, and unpredictable. He is hospitalized for consultation. The diagnosis: Vascular Dementia with Psychosis and Delirium. Stanley places calls to Natalie from the hospital, repeatedly accusing her of being happy now that she is alone and free to be with her several boyfriends. She hangs up on him twice. A final call from the hospital informs her that Stanley has died. Depressed about the facts of their final separation, Natalie tells Linda: "Heck of a way to end your life, isn't it? I can't undo it."

Linda resists ending her film: "All I can do is keep filming." She explains: "I wasn't willing to end my film yet, no matter how many years it took. Then *suddenly, it happened*." She finds a filmed message made by her father years earlier. Here is yet another Stanley, who speaks solo to the camera with a message for Natalie. In a remarkable expression of love, he tells her he "wants to say some nice things." He tells her, "I owe you a lot" and apologizes for his past behavior, for not being "as nice as I should have been to you. I used to try to punish myself. I don't know where it came from. Believe me, I love you, always did." Linda appraises the message: "There. He said it. As usual, in his own time, in his own way."

Linda shares the message with Natalie, who now had her own closure. "It makes me feel good." What of Linda's resolution? Her concluding words in *You See Me*: "It was only after watching dad's video that we could understand the past. All those times with dad when we were wondering if there really was love behind that brutal gaze. To see dad as a flawed, complex, yet loving man enabled me to forgive him. Now with this ending, I can finally move on."

Has Linda Brown created "Stanley Jekyll" to ease the emotional starvation she suffered under "Stanley Hyde"? In the end, does it matter?