



FEATURED ON THE PBS SERIES

[I]NDEPENDENTLENS

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To view trailer or download stills go to: www.yourelookingatme.com

Running Time: 53 min. High Definition Video

you're
LOOKING
at me
LIKE I LIVE HERE I
and i don't

FILM REVIEW QUOTES

"You're Looking at Me Like I Live Here and I Don't provides a poignant portrait of a woman struggling to express herself in a constricted world that eludes her understanding. We know that Alzheimer's disease is common. This film teaches us that the dementia experience is unique, lonely, and intensely personal."

-Dr. Victor Henderson, Professor, Stanford University School of Medicine

"You're Looking At Me Like I Live Here And I Don't allows us to peer inside the life of Lee Gorewitz, a woman with Alzheimer's and a whole lot of personality. At times funny, sad, confused and even callous, Lee helps us see what she sees - through the eyes of a person with Alzheimer's living in an assisted living facility. This wonderful film can help everyone learn about the Alzheimer's experience."

-Elizabeth S. Edgerly, PhD. Chief Program Officer, Alzheimer's Association Northern California & Northern Nevada

"You're Looking At Me Like I Live Here And I Don't is the first film to truly present the perspective of the person with dementia. It is a great contribution to the understanding of Alzheimer's disease and a respectful portrait of those who are afflicted."

-Steve Zweig, Director, University of Missouri Interdisciplinary Center on Aging

LOGLINE

In the middle stages of Alzheimer's disease, Lee Gorewitz seeks acceptance among fellow residents at the Traditions Alzheimer's & Other Dementia Care Unit as she fights against the forces of a past she cannot remember.

FILM SYNOPSIS (SHORT)

In Danville, California, Lee Gorewitz wanders day after day on a soul-searching odyssey through her Alzheimer's care unit. Confined by the limits of her physical boundaries, she scavenges for reminders of her old identity in the outside world.

Lee scours photographs of family members for clues. Yet her search is for more than a word, or a memory, or a familiar face. It is a quest for understanding.

A total immersion into the fragmented experience of mental illness, YOU'RE LOOKING AT ME LIKE I LIVE HERE AND I DON'T is the first documentary filmed exclusively in an Alzheimer's care unit, told from the perspective of someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Although the cognitive deterioration due to Alzheimer's is devastating, Lee Gorewitz embodies the resilience of the human spirit. Here is the Alzheimer's odyssey of a woman who will not let us forget her — even as she struggles to remember herself.



FILM SYNOPSIS (LONG)

In Danville, California, the Traditions Alzheimer's & Other Dementia Care Unit houses twenty residents, most of whom are shepherded by caregivers through scheduled activities such as balloon baseball and bingo. For them, life is routine.

For Lee Gorewitz, life is an odyssey.

From the moment she wakes up, Lee wanders through the boundaries of the unit. Along her route, she gazes through windows, examines other residents' rooms, and strains to see outside the front entrance. An enigmatic outsider, Lee is on a quest for something that she can neither articulate nor comprehend; she is interested only in where her instincts guide her.

Drawn to family photographs scattered throughout her bedroom, Lee is unable to identify herself in the pictures. Combing through the items in her closet, she mistakes an everyday outfit for her wedding dress. Seeking answers elsewhere, Lee finds a birthday card but cannot recognize that she is the "Mom" to whom the card is addressed. Exasperated and missing her children, Lee embraces a make-believe family of stuffed animals.

Although she lacks the ability to grasp memories, Lee's attempts at recollection demonstrate unusual and poetic candor. Reflecting on her birthplace, she says, "Brooklyn, it's right behind you." Regarding her deceased husband, she professes, "How do I even say it? The air—was very good." Considering love, she intones, "That's a damn good thing to work with."

With a past that is out of reach, Lee turns her attention to her present surroundings. When in good spirits, she is near angelic: consoling heartbroken women, kissing caregivers, and shaking a tail feather even after the music has stopped. But with no realistic option for leaving, Lee gives in to frustration. She argues with a tablemate during lunch, kicks a bouncy ball at a decrepit man's legs, and unapologetically tells a sickly woman that she is going to die.

Although Lee struggles to coexist with the other residents, she tries to accept her new home. On a final evening lap around the unit, Lee approaches her caregiver and says, "Now I'm going to my family. Aren't you mine?"

Widowed, cloistered, and slowly undone by her inability to think or speak clearly, Lee has every reason to succumb to the expectations of her conditions. Instead, she defies despondency. When she breaks down, she rebuilds. When she loses words, she summons emotions. And, despite the small defeats of her efforts, she remains an exceptional and resilient soul.

Immersed in the confounding logic of Alzheimer's, Lee's story adheres to the discordant, but never fully crippling, rhythms of the disease. Here is one extraordinary woman who will not let us forget her — even as she struggles to remember herself.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“You’re Looking At Me Like I Live Here And I Don’t”: Making a Film in an Alzheimer’s Unit

In the fall of 2008, I wrote a screenplay I intended to film entirely in an Alzheimer’s Unit. After many weeks of rehearsals, I arrived at a troubling realization: I was not just making a challenging film—I was making the wrong film.

Writing a fictional Alzheimer’s narrative—creating a neat and orderly plot whose course I could control, about a disease by nature chaotic and nonlinear—was impossible. In the way that a son or a daughter doesn’t know exactly what to expect during a visit with a parent who has Alzheimer’s, it’s inconceivable (some might even say ridiculous) for a screenwriter to map out the trajectory of a scene in an Alzheimer’s Unit, and to expect it to play itself out in a manner remotely resembling what was written.

Other than the loose structure provided by a schedule of daily activities—a parachute toss, the hair salon, an oldies sing-a-long—life in an Alzheimer’s Unit does not follow the logic of the real world. It is founded upon the incidental and accidental: a string of interactions and experiences that digress unpredictably, omnidirectionally, and constantly turn back on themselves. The Alzheimer’s Unit almost never adheres to the continuity of the linear narratives that we enjoy on a daily basis—or that screenplays require.

The first time I visited the Traditions Alzheimer’s Unit in Danville, California, I was greeted at the door by Lee Gorewitz, a spry septuagenarian in a baby blue jogging suit. With the exuberance of a cruise director, Lee presented herself as a staff member, took my hand and gave me a tour, during which she delivered a soliloquy unlike anything I had ever heard before. For well over a minute she prattled on about purses, windows, and gardens, before she eventually locked eyes with me and said: “I hear the song in my ears, and I think they don’t love me anymore.”

From this spontaneous word-salad came two things that forever altered my film project: I realized Lee was not staff, but a resident. And, I decided, her presence in the Unit was reason enough to throw away that screenplay I’d just written.

For the next six months I visited Lee with the hope of making a documentary that would capture her inner universe: the discord and frustration, the communication breakdown and uninhibited behavior everyone speaks of when they speak of Alzheimer’s—and the unusually poetic candor it can distill. Reflecting on her birthplace, Lee would say, “Brooklyn, it’s right behind you.” Considering love: “That’s a damn good thing to work with.” Regarding her deceased husband: “How do I even say it? The air — was very good.”

For Lee, as for many in an Alzheimer’s Unit, every day is an odyssey: wandering to and fro with no destination in particular, on a quest for something that she can neither articulate nor comprehend. Having advanced Alzheimer’s was once described to me by a neuroscientist as akin to waking up in the middle of hinterland Russia, alone, not knowing a lick of the local language, not knowing how you got there, and being expected to act like it was home.

Due to that constant sense of disorientation, in the span of minutes Lee could morph from pensive thinker to gregarious helper; from bubbly mover-and-shaker to morose and sometimes cruel instigator.

When in good spirits, she consoled heartbroken women, kissed caregivers, and shook a tail feather even after the music had stopped. And with no realistic option for leaving, Lee also gave in to frustration: she argued with her tablemate at lunch, kicked a bouncy ball at a frail man's legs, and unapologetically told a sickly woman that she is going to die.

My time with Lee, and her struggle, left me utterly confounded. Who should say Lee's fragmented reality is any less valid than my own?

Composer John Cage once wrote, "The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I think it's not beautiful. And very shortly you discover that there is no reason." A shift happened for me when I started to embrace the sublime chaos of Lee's world. Spending time with her became not about mourning what can never be retrieved, her past, nor was it about analyzing the tragedy of her plight. It became about letting Lee tell her own story, one unfolding in the context of a cruel, debilitating disease. And it became about learning that there was no reason not to let that story be beautiful.

In ways that are often painful and intense for the rest of us, Lee and others with Alzheimer's stumble along a road we're all traveling, trying—often desperately—to communicate something, anything, grasping for unanswerable riddles.

And until there's a cure for Alzheimer's, there's one way, outside of medicine, to counter this disease. Something we all have within our reach, whatever the road, whatever our relative agility at traversing it:

Empathy.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER Scott Kirschenbaum

A participant in the 2010-2011 SF Film Society FilmHouse Residency, Scott Kirschenbaum's other projects include *A Soapbox In Haiti*, a speaker series that premiered on four Haitian television stations on the one-year anniversary of the earthquake, and *Elementary Cool*, a short fiction film that screened at Playworks' "Play On" Conference in Fall 2010 and participated in the San Francisco Film Society's "Filmmakers in the Classroom" program in 2011.

Kirschenbaum previously completed the documentary *Jumor: A Journey through Jewish Humor*, about the role of humor in Jewish nursing homes around the country. He has written profiles of the elderly for the *Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine*, performed stand-up comedy for nursing home residents, and served as a personal assistant to a screenwriter suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

PRODUCER Shane Boris

Shane Ostroff Boris grew up with gusto in an America of the 1980s with broken bones, lost loves, and burning stars always eluding his clumsy, generous graspings. He then left the decade for other experiments in whirlwinding and lesson learning - the holy be; the determined strive; the ecstatic Hoo-rah! In ways numerous and bold, he worked with homeless populations in Colorado, indigenous communities in Alaska, and children's advocacy organizations in India. He devised strategies for alternative banks in San Francisco and public health technology companies in Denver. He produced award-winning plays and films. And with so many suffering from Alzheimer's, including the dearest of loved ones, "You're Looking at Me" is a documentary of deep personal significance.

CO-PRODUCER Gracey Nagle

Gracey Nagle founded Single Mom Films, a production company based in Molalla, Oregon, to support artistic endeavors that address timely social issues. She was Producer of the speaker series "A Soapbox in Haiti," Co-Producer on the feature documentary "You're Looking At Me Like I Live Here And I Don't," and Associate Producer on the short film "Elementary Cool."

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER/EDITOR Stuart Sloan

Stuart Sloan was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He has both a Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Film from Queen's University Belfast, and co-founded the filmmaking company X-Ray Eye Films. In 2008, Stuart directed the documentary short "Counterweight," which deals with the changing face of his city, which showed at various festivals and cinemas in Ireland. He also was part of a three-man crew that made the rare low-budget Northern Irish feature film "I Wanted to Talk to You Last Night", and has been commissioned to create films and installation art for several Irish art galleries. In the U.S., he was a consulting editor on the short film "Elementary Cool". Stuart is currently editing a feature film concerning the San Francisco Ballet with Cannes- and Sundance-winning Director Rob Nilsson, as well as a documentary chronicling the Los Angeles instrumental hip-hop scene.

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER John Givens

John Givens is a San Francisco artist, filmmaker and musician. He directed "Working Title", a documentary about career, identity and the American artist, which premiered at the SF MOMA and was featured at the Mill Valley Film Festival. His work has been shown at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Intersection for the Arts, and the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery. By day, John is a Senior Art Director at Underground Advertising, where he does design, strategy and advertising for non-profit organizations.

ORIGINAL MUSIC Nadia Shihab

Nadia Shihab is a San Francisco-based musician working within a minimalist aesthetic using acoustic instruments and modern technologies. Prior to performing her own compositions, she was the violinist of the indie rock band Swim Party in San Diego. She has performed at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and the Y2K International Looping Festival in Santa Cruz, and is best known for her live and intimate experimental improvisations.



CREDIT LIST

Directed by

Scott Kirschenbaum

Produced by

Shane Boris Scott Kirschenbaum

Director of Photography

Michael Sly

Edited by

Stuart Sloan Susanna Lichter

Location Supervisor

Karen Kelleher

Co-Produced by

Gracey Nagle

Associate Produced by

Kevin Crawford Ken Fisher John Givens Stuart Sloan

Sound Design by

Kevin Crawford

Original Music Composed by

Nadia Shihab

Storyboard Artist/Graphic Design

Scott Green

Graphic Design

Anna Grace Michelle Snow

Logo & Additional Design

John Givens

Web Design

Ken Fisher Jesse Gottesman Michelle Snow

Still Photography

Phillip Maisel

Fiscal Sponsorship Provided By

The San Francisco Film Society

TECHNICAL SPECS

Running time: 53 minutes

Shooting formats: HDV

Aspect ratio: 1:1.77 (hard matte)

Sound: Stereo (English)

Rating: Not Rated

Available screening formats: HDCam, NTSC DigiBeta, PAL DigiBeta, NTSC BetaSP, PAL BetaSP

