



HERE ONE DAY

A Film By

Kathy Leichter

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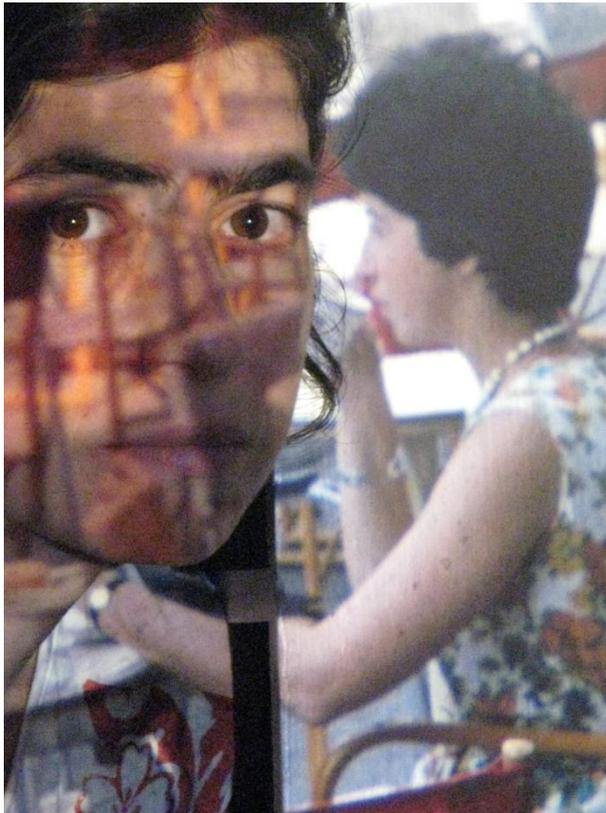
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LOGLINE:

Told through the intimate, dramatic audiotapes left behind by a bipolar mother after committing suicide and the longing daughter who discovered them, *HERE ONE DAY* follows a quintessential New York family through life, devastation, tragedy, and rebirth.

SYNOPSIS:

When filmmaker Kathy Lichter moved back into her childhood home after her mother committed suicide, she discovered a hidden box of audiotapes. Sixteen years passed before she had the courage to delve into this trove, unearthing details that her mother had recorded about every aspect of her life from the challenges of her marriage to a New York State Senator, to her son's estrangement, to her struggles with bipolar disorder. *HERE ONE DAY* is a bracing, visually arresting, emotionally candid film about a woman coping with mental illness, her relationships with her family, and the ripple effects of her suicide on those she loved.

**DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:**

When I began with the seed of an idea for this film in 2004, I was filled with a mixture of fear and desire. I wanted to tell the formative story of my life, but there was so much at stake. I love making films about other people's stories but after completing my previous film, *A DAY'S WORK, A DAY'S PAY* (ITVS/PBS, 2001), which followed three welfare recipients in New York City, I couldn't tell another person's story until I had told my own. As *HERE ONE DAY* developed, I recognized the universality of the story and how its themes of family, love, illness, loss, and resilience could speak to everybody. I was thrilled to be creating something that could first move people emotionally and then also raise awareness and

reduce stigma around mental illness and suicide by letting audiences know it may be safe to tell our stories, whatever they may be.

Like Claude Lanzmann who made Shoah so visually stunning in order to “make the unbearable bearable,” I wanted *HERE ONE DAY* to be beautiful. I wanted to use high production values to reach people on an emotional level, to have them feel their own humanity and a connection to the individuals in the film. My goal was to tell a psychologically sophisticated story--each of the characters would be as nuanced and complicated as people are in real life--using the tools of cinema. I chose wonderfully talented artists to help me do this.

Director of Photography Kirsten Johnson and I strove to create images that would speak to audiences on a visceral level: a solitary wooden chair, a butterfly fluttering up a window pane, a circular blade of grass rustled by the wind. Johnson’s images strike the eye and capture the heart, allowing audiences to absorb tough emotions and have equally powerful responses. Because my mother was an artist and a colorful person, I also wanted the film to reflect her delight in color and the visual world.

We continued to create a cinematic language of emotion in the edit room, using sound, pacing, and juxtaposition. Editor Pola Rapaport and I evaluated every moment for its authenticity and tone, peeling away each scene’s layers to find its emotional core. Composer Nathan Halpern and I wanted the score to be an additional narrative force. Says Halpern, “The music reflects the resilience of familial love. Musical motifs highlight the interconnectivity of the characters’ emotional lives. Using acoustic guitar, piano, and solo strings, the score strikes a tone that is at once optimistic and bittersweet.”

By film’s end I wanted audiences to be left with a complex interaction of human beings. I wanted mental illness to feel more real, as if it could happen to any of us. I wanted suicide to feel less a sensationalized drama, for it too happens to so many, from all ethnicities and backgrounds. Most importantly, I wanted to portray a family, like so many others, trying to do its best under difficult circumstances, far from torn asunder, yet fundamentally transformed.

FESTIVALS:

IDFA, Competition for First Appearance, November 2012

Hot Docs, April 2013

The Cleveland International Film Festival, April 2013

The Independent Film Festival Boston, April 2013

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, August 2013

CREW BIOS:

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER: KATHY LEICHTER: Kathy Leichter is a documentary film producer and director and the founder of Two Suns Media and Mint Leaf Productions. In addition to directing and producing *HERE ONE DAY*, she recently produced *HIDDEN BATTLES*, a documentary about the psychological impact of killing on soldiers from across the globe. Previous Director/Producer credits include *PASSING ON*, a film about her ninety-one year old, tell-it-like-it-is grandmother, Elsa, an Austrian Jewish immigrant and family therapist, and the award-winning PBS documentary, *A DAY'S WORK, A DAY'S PAY*, produced in association with ITVS, about three welfare recipients who become leaders in the fight against workfare in New York City. Kathy was the Project Director of *THE WORKFARE MEDIA INITIATIVE*, a media activism project which trained current and former welfare recipients to show *A DAY'S WORK, A DAY'S PAY* and lead facilitated discussions. Other credits include co-producer of *SPIT IT OUT*, a documentary about a man who stutters and his journey towards self-acceptance and producer of the award-winning *MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: MIRRORS THAT BIND*, about the impact of the mother/daughter relationship on a woman's body, sexuality, and self-esteem. Formerly Leichter worked at WQED-PBS, where she associate produced a national series on health care reform and worked for *MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD*.

EDITOR: POLA RAPAPORT: Writer/ director/ editor of many award winning films, including: *HAIR: LET THE SUNSHINE IN*, the definitive documentary on the phenomenal Broadway musical; *WRITER OF O*, a portrait of the elusive author of the erotic novel *Story of O*; *FAMILY SECRET*, the story of the filmmaker's search into her father's secretive life and of the discovery of her secret Romanian brother; *BLIND LIGHT*, a story of a photographer's peak experience in a villa in Italy, starring Edie Falco; and *BROKEN MEAT*, a portrait of the mad poet, Alan Granville. Pola was the editor of several feature documentaries, including the award-winning "GRACE PALEY: COLLECTED SHORTS", "AUF WIEDERSEHEN", "TAKE IT BACK: THE MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY AND HOWARD DEAN" and "FINE RAIN." Pola is a Guggenheim Foundation Fellow and winner of numerous grants & awards and a Sound Editing Emmy nominee.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: KIRSTEN JOHNSON: Kirsten Johnson was the recipient of the 2010 Sundance Documentary Competition Excellence in Cinematography Award for *THE OATH*. She shot the Tribeca Film Festival 2008 Documentary winner, *PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL* and Warner Independent/Participant Pictures' *DARFUR NOW*. She has worked with directors such as Raoul Peck, Barbara Kopple, Gini Riticker, and Michael Moore. Her cinematography is featured in *FARENHEIT 911*, Academy Award-nominated *ASYLUM*, Emmy award-winning *LADIES FIRST*, and the Sundance premiere documentaries, *THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED*, *AMERICAN STANDOFF*, and *DERRIDA*. Johnson's cinematography is featured in the book, "The Art of the Documentary". Her feature film script "MY HABIBI" was selected for the 2006 Sundance Writer's Lab and Director's Lab and received an Annenberg grant.

DEADLINE, co-directed with Katy Chevigny, premiered at Sundance in 2004, was broadcast on primetime NBC, and won the Thurgood Marshall Award.

COMPOSER: NATHAN HALPERN: A self-taught composer and singer/songwriter from New York City, Nathan Halpern made his film scoring debut in 2011 with RENEE (ESPN Films/30 for 30), whose musical score was critically lauded as an “excellent score” by *The Huffington Post*. His next film, MARINA ABRAMOVIC: THE ARTIST IS PRESENT (HBO Films), a documentary on the legendary performance artist, won the Panorama Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Berlin International Film Festival. The film premiered at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival in the U.S. Documentary Competition. For this minimalist classical, Balkan-influenced score, Halpern produced and performed the score, commissioning musicians from the NYC underground music scene as featured soloists. Halpern was commissioned to score the documentary AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: 50 YEARS (2011), and has composed the music for a roster of shorts and features, including the upcoming animated BIG SWIM (2012) and the feature documentary TRUTH IN TRANSLATION (2012), as well as a series of commercial spots for Sony, Kodak, Neiman Marcus, and The New York Times.

PRESS:

BALTIMORE SUN, September 30th, 2013

[Mother's Suicide Leads Documentarian To Make Candid Film](#) by Kathy Hudson

When I returned to my childhood home, I discovered 300 family Civil War letters. I have transcribed them, but nothing more.

Not so Kathy Leichter. The Cornell graduate and daughter of former New York State senator Franz Leichter left Pittsburgh's public television station six months after her mother committed suicide in 1995 by jumping out the dining room window of her apartment in [Manhattan](#), N.Y. Leichter returned to her childhood home and found a hidden box of audiotapes her mother had made.

Those audiotapes are now the spine of her intimate, candid and award-winning film, "Here One Day."

Creator, producer and director Leichter comes to Baltimore for two, free screenings Thursday, Oct. 10 at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. at the Church of the Redeemer, 5603 North Charles St.

Filmed by Kirsten Johnson, winner of the 2010 [Sundance](#) Excellence in Cinematography award, "Here One Day" is in worldwide distribution.

Eight years and \$250,000 in the making, the film has a Baltimore connection. Longtime [Roland Park](#) resident Lindy Lord, whose husband, Chick, committed suicide in 2000, met Leichter in 2012 at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's National Day of Healing in Baltimore, where Leichter was a presenter and participant. At a session for family survivors, they sat together.

After seeing the film later that day, Lord remembers, "I was hooked on the idea of getting this film out there."

Lord first helped in fundraising efforts for the film. Then, a friend sent her an online reflection on [mental illness](#) by the Rev. Caroline Stewart, senior associate rector at Redeemer. Lord asked Stewart the next day if the film could be shown at the church. Stewart feels strongly about bringing mental illness into community dialogue.

"The issue of mental illness not only impacts individuals in our congregation," she says, "but also is part of the current dialogue in our country. The church therefore has a responsibility to provide a forum for discussion and education."

After seeing a clip at [hereoneday.com](#), I now plan to see the film. Most of us know an adult or teenager lost to suicide. It is hard to know how to help surviving families, and even harder for them to deal with the cataclysm of suicide.

Leichter talks of her own struggle after her mother's death.

"I moved home within six months," she says. "I wanted to be close to my father, who was living in the apartment, and I wanted to be close to my mother, as close as I could be. Even though that meant living in the apartment where she killed herself, it was still our family home."

Leichter, a career documentarian, had used her earlier films, like "A Day's Work, A Day's Pay," as social activism, but she did not even start making "Here One Day" until nine years after her mother died.

"I would never have imagined doing this," she said. "I couldn't even look at the photos or say, 'My mother committed suicide.' ... When I found out I was having a second son, it unleashed a wave of grief."

She started with a film about mother-loss.

"Then, I showed a sample to a friend, who said it was very distant. I realized the story I wanted to tell was my own story: what happened to her and what happened to us. It had been a film of people talking about my mother. Then it became a film of her talking about herself.

"When I finally did listen to the tapes, they were so powerful," Leichter said. "I felt as if I was talking to her."

Adding the tapes to the film changed everything.

Amazed by the film's impact on herself and others, Leichter says, "I went from being someone who couldn't even say this happened to me, to telling it all over the world."

Read more: <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/north-baltimore/ph-ms-hudsons-corner-1003-20130930,0,1312180.story#ixzz2gmIo3bSq>

PRETTY CLEVER FILMS, MAY, 14th, 2013

[Interview with Kathy Leichter, Director of Here One Day](#) by Brandy Dean

After Nina Leichter committed suicide her daughter Kathy moved back into her childhood home to maintain a connection to her lost mother. In 2004, after her success as a documentary filmmaker and an advocate for media activism, Kathy found the courage to examine her own deeply personal story with the same probing, critical attention she has brought to the stories of others. The result is *Here One Day*, a moving, powerful, and ultimately cathartic – for both filmmaker and viewer – story about family, grief, and mental illness. I sat down with Kathy to discuss the making of the film and what motivated her to tell her story now.

Death is difficult, both as part of the human experience and as a topic of discussion. When that death is a suicide, compounded by mental illness, it becomes one of the most taboo topics for discussion, perhaps even internally. My first question for Kathy was, of course, why? Why tell this story? Why discuss something so personal and painful so publicly? She did not hesitate with her answer for a second.

"I felt like I couldn't ask someone else to tell their own story if I wasn't willing to tell mine," says Kathy. "I just realized if I lived to be ninety and I was on my deathbed and I hadn't told this story, I would be kicking myself."

Every filmmaker takes a giant leap of faith – think about the million things that could go wrong – and this is especially true of documentary film, where you might not find the story you expected. I wondered how that risk plays out in a documentary that focuses on a painful, family topic.

"I knew I would have to confront myself as an artist, and that was terrifying," says Kathy. "But I definitely didn't realize what I was making. I mean it was 2004 when I started, 9 years after my mom died, and as a family we had never really sat down and talked about it."

Now, in 2013, with film completed and screening at festivals, Kathy seems to genuinely marvel at the fact that so many years passed in her own family without more open discussion about their loss, its causes, and its consequences. I ask if that prolonged silence was part of the motivation.

“Yes, I think so. Suicide is very scary to talk about,” says Kathy. “As difficult as it is, I’m excited to spark interest and understanding about suicide and mental illness. The film really came from inside of me, I didn’t know if anyone would care. But one thing I really hope is that encourages people to be more open and honest with the people around them.” On the topic of honesty with those around you, I wondered how her family felt about the project, especially Kathy’s brother who had a strained relationship with their mother.

“My father was very supportive from the start, but my brother didn’t want to be in at all,” says Kathy. “But when we started and he saw some of the footage he felt like he needed to participate. He ultimately jumped in feet first and really opened up.”

A critical component of *Here One Day* – the thing that makes the film so powerful – is that Nina Leichter herself is in it, almost twenty years past her death. Via diary-like audio recordings, she appears in the film not as an abstraction, a statistic, or a victim. Instead, she is alive, vital, present, and very funny. These recordings are so central to the film, I almost forgot to ask Kathy about them.

“I knew the tapes existed in 1995 but I was nowhere near ready to listen to them. I waited til the very end, and listened. It was my mom alive again,” says Kathy. “I thought, wow we can put her in the movie.” I do not want to sound flip here – but Kathy and I had a conversational double take at this point. I knew from the press materials that she had waited for many years to listen to the tapes, but I had never imagined that she was already making the film before doing so. I assumed that the tapes were the spark.

“When I started making the film, I still wasn’t ready to listen to them,” says Kathy. “Now I wish I had more. There’s 10 hours of the tapes, but I wish I had hours and hours and hours of them.”

Kathy describes making *Here One Day* as the vehicle she used to confront her own grief. I’m willing to hazard that many other people will find that same comfort in this film. Loss is loss and grief is grief, whether the loss is a result of suicide or natural causes, whether the disease is of the mind or body. The gift that Kathy Leichter gives her mother Nina with this film is one of completeness – wife, mother, sufferer of bipolar disorder, artist, poet, a woman who took her own life, comedienne – she is all of these things simultaneously.

“Things are changing now in terms of education and awareness about suicide and mental illness. People are using the word ‘recovery’ now,” says Kathy. “Audiences seem to be moved by this story. They approach me and are so spectacular and so honest, so brave about their own stories. I’m grateful if I’ve touched people like that.”

SHALOMLIFE, MAY 13, 2013

[EXCLUSIVE: Interview with 'Here One Day' Director, Kathy Leichter](#) by Anthony Marcusa

The grieving process takes many different forms, with closure coming via unexpected or unforeseen means, occasionally out of one's control. For Kathy Leichter, whose mother Nina died in 1995, the journey occurred across 15 years, involving a video camera, hours of audio diaries, a supportive-albeit at times reluctant- family, and lots of unexpected revelations.

“Nine years after she died I found out I was having a son, and I was hit like a tsunami with a huge amount of grief,” says Kathy while in Toronto for the Hot Docs Film Festival, where her movie, *Here One Day*, made its Canadian debut.

“I thought I was having a daughter, and I realized that I had wanted a girl to recreate and repair this other mother-daughter relationship.”

Nina Leichter committed suicide, leaving behind her husband, a son, and a daughter. Nina was unable to carry on dealing with the debilitating effects of bipolar disorder, deciding to jump out the kitchen window of a house she raised a family in, the same house Kathy returns to after her mother's death.

The window remains unaltered as the film begins.

Leichter, a Jewish filmmaker living in New York City, thought that perhaps a documentary exploring familial relationships and the grieving process would be both interesting to an audience and beneficial personally. It took nine years to even contemplate making a film, and several more to discover how she wanted to present the final product. Unexpected feedback provided by a friend inspired the extraordinarily intimate tone of *Here One Day*.

“It took me a while to realize what I wanted to tell was this very personal and incredibly intimate story,” continues Leichter. “My friend had watched a trailer I put together and told me it seemed like I was defending against something. In that moment, I realized what I really wanted to do.”

What unfolds is a story about a Jewish family coping with the loss of a loved one, a cathartic tale of confronting emotions and understanding the powerful effects of mental illness. Adding to the intimacy is a haunting, yet humanizing element: over eight hours of audio tapes recorded by Nina Leichter prior to her death. At times funny and sad, thoughtful and introspective, and always self aware, these audio diaries are illuminating. Leichter was aware of their existence all along, but had never listened to them.

“Here is this person who doesn’t even have photographs up on the wall,” she explains about herself. “I had to look at hundreds of images, old super eights, and the rough cut of the film was an hour and a half, and that was before the tapes.”

“I tell my editor that I have these tapes and she practically murders me,” says Leichter, jokingly. As a filmmaker, she knows these compelling pieces of audio recorded by the movie’s central character are powerful and essential. As a daughter, she is reluctant. “I had to listen to these tapes,” she says. “I was scared, but it was sort of delightful. I was like, ‘hi mom.’ We were having this conversation – it was a one way conversation, but still, she was funny, she was creative; they were a window to her soul. It was cathartic.”

The film-making process not only helped Kathy understand loss and mental illness issues, but also forced the hand of her family, who may or may not have been ready to deal directly with the death of a mother. Her father and her aunt were supportive from the start, her brother less so until watching a trailer of the documentary and realizing he was a pivotal figure.

When on-camera, people tend to open up, and that is exactly what happens as conversations occurred that may have been tough to initiate otherwise. “The camera created a license to say things and ask things I may not have been necessarily able to. My brother was so grateful, so generous with what he shared.”

While at first thinking it was him who would be the hardest to show the finished product to, it was in fact her father. “I realized how much of his story and life I told and exposed,” says Leichter, admitting that each family member learned something from the experience. Among those lessons were ones about mental illness, as Leichter explains her mother’s disorder was almost like a fifth family member, simply something they had to deal with but didn’t exactly know how. “The movie revealed to me a lot, I didn’t realize my mom was so self aware,” says Leichter. “It gave me an understanding of what she was up against.”

Leichter continues to show the film around the world, and has received immense support from medical professionals, Jewish communities, as well as those dealing with mental illness in a more personal way. Response has been monumentally positive, and certainly an element to its success is the openness with which Leichter and her family approach the documentary. They are open and self aware, willing to allow viewers to come close, while allowing themselves and hopefully many others to learn from the experience. Leichter encourages others not to be ashamed or closed off or scared about past trauma, about mental illness, about grieving.

“The movie helps to give a place for releases, for feelings of terror and anxiety,” concludes Leichter. “There is a mixture of pride and emotional openness. This is who we are. Look what we have to reckon with in our families. We shouldn’t be quiet about this.”

PRETTY CLEVER FILMS, April 2013

[Hot Docs 2013: Here One Day \(2013\)](#) by Sam Cooper

With *Here One Day*, director Kathy Leichter has created a lyrical, if searingly painful, documentary detailing the suicide of her mother, Nina. Married to New York senator Franz S. Leichter, Kathy's mother had been dealing with the ups and downs of her bipolar disorder for eighteen years. Through boxes of audio recordings, writings, poetry and other assorted oddities, Kathy utilizes these materials to help her understand, but more importantly cope, with her mother's sudden death. Through the course of the film we meet each member of her immediate family and see how this unfortunate event has severely impacted their lives. These are very touching and tender moments juxtaposed with memories that are fueled by anger and despair. This is a mental illness that took a serious toll on a family and almost tore it apart.

Not since 2008's *Dear Zachary* will a documentary leave you feeling so dispirited. *Here One Day* is not a heartwarming feature, it's subject material is very tragic and mature. Perhaps that's why it stings so hard. The subject of mental illness is usually swept under the carpet when it comes to media attention, left shackled in humanity's closet of skeletons. Needless to say, it's a very touchy subject. Although this film may be cathartic in nature, it's incredibly evocative. By the end you may wonder to yourself what the point of all this is. The answer is simple. As Kathy says, "For Nina's sake, hug someone you love."

This is a documentary that you should not miss.

Filmmaker Magazine, November 30th, 2012

[Top of The Doc: Toasting 25 Years at IDFA 2012](#) by Lauren Wissot

Excerpt:

"I continually found myself delighted and surprised by all the big things that came in smaller packages during this 25th edition. So...here's to a future golden anniversary – and here are ten IDFA flicks that kept me on the edge of my seat, capturing both my heart and mind....

Kathy Leichter's *Here One Day*, playing in the First Appearance Competition, was one of those happy accidents that I always look forward to at film festivals.

Though the flick screened at IFP's Independent Film Week, a doc about Leichter's bipolar mother (and her suicide – which, to add to the personal tragedy, made national news since Nina Leichter was the wife of former New York State Senator Franz Leichter) culled from family photos and audiocassette recordings and journals that Nina left behind, just didn't seem like a universal story that would grab me. My skepticism, though, was soon vanquished via top-notch editing – juxtaposing home movies with emotionally honest interviews with family members – and the treasure trove of Nina's inner world, forming a blueprint into the manic depressive mind, much like [Alan] Berliner's award-winning film. Most striking, however, is that *Here One Day* actually plays like a mystery. "Who is Nina?" is the question asked in every frame, the elusive answer a Rosebud for the entire Leichter clan."

Filmmaker Magazine, September 17th, 2012:

BORN OUT OF GRIEF: KATHY LEICHTER'S "HERE ONE DAY" by David Licata

FULL ARTICLE:

I first found out about Kathy Leichter's documentary, [*Here One Day*](#), via an email announcing the film's Kickstarter campaign. Like many independent filmmakers, I receive many such emails. But what set this one apart from the others was the sender, filmmaker/editor (and friend) Pola Rapaport, whose work I greatly admire – and the film's subject. *Here One Day* (screening at IFP's Independent Film Week, Spotlight on Documentaries) is about Kathy's mother's bipolar disorder and suicide. It's a story about what a person with mental illness does to a family—a story many of us can relate to—and how a family copes and moves on. When I heard about *Here One Day*, I wondered what it would be like to make that kind of personal documentary? What are the challenges of probing loss so intimately, of revealing a family's difficult history, of interviewing parents and siblings about matters they would perhaps rather not discuss?

I myself am making a (very different) film which grew out of grief, [*A Life's Work*](#) (currently in post), about four people who are engaged with Herculean projects they likely won't see completed in their lifetimes, projects that could have a profound, global impact. I interviewed an astronomer, an architect, a gospel music archivist, and a tree farmer and asked them about their lifelong passion. I was looking for answers about life's purpose. I think of this film as an extremely personal work even though it isn't about me or anyone in my family and I'm not it.

I wanted to talk with Kathy about the emotional origins of our films, so I asked Pola to introduce me to her. Here's some of our conversation about grief, filmmaking and more.

David Licata: When did you realize this was a film you had to make?

Kathy Leichter: If anyone had told me after my mother killed herself in 1995 that I would start making a movie about her and her death nine years later, I probably would have punched them in the face. It took those nine years for the idea of this film and the

desire to make it to germinate in me. It began gradually in 2004. My original idea for *Here One Day* (which I was calling *Motherland*, at the time) began as a rumination on mother-loss in my family across generations. My father's mother was killed in the Holocaust. His trauma around her death shaped him in many profound ways, from the career he chose to the woman he married, my mother. I wanted to look at the effects that losing a mother had on a person. I thought I would examine it from a somewhat detached standpoint. I had no idea how deep and personal I would get.

It took several years of shooting before it became clear that what I was doing was really taking a journey to let go of my mother. It's funny how we trick ourselves into doing things that our conscious mind isn't ready to accept.

Did *A Life's Work* start out being what it is now?

Licata: *A Life's Work* came about when I was grieving my mother. During that time I remembered being told in grammar school that medieval cathedrals took generations to construct, and back then I thought that was the craziest thing ever. So the grief and this memory combined and sparked my imagination. I thought, wouldn't it be interesting to talk to people who are doing things they won't see completed in their lifetime? What is their perspective on time, mortality, and legacy? So it started as me searching for an answer to the question, why am I here? Only later on did I realize that the subjects were telling everyone's story. Sure, they're involved in these dramatic, outsized projects, like the search for extraterrestrial intelligence or building an experimental city in the Arizona desert, but we all check out before we finish our work. I love it when I give people the elevator pitch and they say things like, "That sounds like me and my garage, it will never be organized." They say it as a joke, but they're actually spot on!

Leichter: That's funny. I never considered what people's reactions would be. But as I started to be "out" about what I was making, I discovered that people often didn't know what to do when I said that the film was about my mother who had bipolar disorder and committed suicide. Most people get either a pained look on their face or a completely blank look. It's actually something I am used to now, but at first, I was naively surprised. I thought people would ask me questions, want to know more. It became super interesting material to me and I expected others to reflect that interest. I now realize that there's still too much fear and stigma around suicide for people to respond fully. That being said, one thing that is very satisfying is that I do get wonderful responses from other individuals who have lost loved ones to suicide—looks of solidarity, awareness, empathy, as if we know each other's stories, even though each story is different.

Licata: Your previous film, *A Day's Work, A Day's Pay*, was a "social issue" film. *Here One Day* seems like a big departure?

Leichter: *A Day's Work, A Day's Pay* followed three individuals in the welfare system in New York City fighting for economic justice. The film is chock full of drama and energy and hope. It made people feel things and when it was over, audiences were jumping out of their seats to get involved and do something.

The lesson I learned on *Here One Day* is that the personal can be universal and that sometimes it's best that way. In telling my own story, I had told many other people's stories, stories about mental illness, suicide, family, love, and loss that needed to be told. At one of my rough-cut screenings, a woman who had lost her 16-year-old son to suicide said, "I want to thank you. In telling your mother's story, you have told my son's." That was so rewarding for me and also so remarkable. My mother killed herself at age 63. She

was far from 16! And yet, there are aspects of the story that resonate for so many people for so many reasons.

I've also learned from mental health professionals who have seen the film that it is a tremendous training tool to teach how to support families with a loved one who has mental illness. How exciting that the film can be used to help other families with similar situations to our own and to hopefully make things better for them and the person who is ill. Now that's real social change.



Kathy Leichter with her father, Franz

Licata: Did you ever wonder if the film was too personal to find an audience?

Leichter: I really started out making this film for myself, which is kind of funny because I consider myself to be a media activist at heart. I don't imagine my work ever being made in a vacuum, but the audience for this film was initially very far from my mind. As the film took shape in the edit room, I began to realize that I was making something that would fit into my previous experiences as a media activist. It was like a light bulb went off. Suddenly I realized I could use this film in community settings and with NGO's to raise awareness, reduce stigma, support families, and challenge stereotypes about the mentally ill and suicide. I was so excited! My own healing from the film was already worth all of the effort, but now to have it used all over the world will be such an unexpected reward.

Licata: You said it took nine years from the time of your mother's death until you started making the film. Did something happen that said, "Now is the time to make this film"?

Leichter: The concrete inciting incident for beginning the film, though very unconscious, was my pregnancy with what turned out to be my second son. I had already had my first son and just assumed naively that my second child would be a daughter. It felt absolutely inevitable. I was sure I would have a daughter. I needed her to heal my mother-loss in

some way. I never would have been able to articulate this at the time, still I felt I would be able to repair, recreate, re-do the relationship I had with my mother by having my own daughter. I remember the day I saw the sonogram. My heart sank when it dawned on me that I would not have a daughter. I realized very gradually that my healing would have to take place another way. Eight years since I began making the film, I can honestly say that it has. My therapist and husband both joked, “Thank goodness you didn’t have a daughter! Can you imagine being born with that job over your head—to heal your mother’s grief?”

Do you feel like you worked through your grief by making your film?

Licata: Working on the film distracted me. When I started making it, I was still numb. But the more I worked on it, setting up shoots and interviewing the subjects, the more I became excited about filmmaking, and life. I guess you could say the work, and time, helped me get through my grief.

Your family plays a big role in the film. Were they at all reluctant to participate?

Leichter: They have been incredibly supportive of this project. I am so grateful because I was going to dig up old ghosts whether they liked it or not. I’ve shown the film to all of my family members in the film. They’ve approved every frame.

As a family we have been through some uncomfortable moments together in the process of making this film—on-camera and off—and we’ve gotten through them together. For example, during a scene where we were filming my brother, father, and me going through old boxes of my mother’s things. Deeply buried feelings, like the buried papers and old photographs we were unearthing, resurfaced. Guilt, blame, and resentment that they had put aside in order to have a relationship had resurfaced after almost 10 years.

Licata: That’s a very moving scene.

Leichter: Thanks. This argument between my brother and father turned out to be a very powerful, revealing scene in the film. It was very brave and generous of both of them to let me keep it in. It speaks well for my crew, Kirsten Johnson and Judy Karp, that they were able to just melt into the woodwork and keep filming.

Licata: This brings up an interesting point. In many personal films, the director is also the shooter, but for this project you chose to work with cinematographer Kirsten Johnson. It must have been a real leap of faith to let her into the process with you.

Leichter: From the first frame to the last, I wanted this film to be beautiful. I wanted to express emotion—attachment, longing, love, loss—visually. I knew anything I could shoot would fall dismally short of what I was envisioning. Kirsten and I had been very close friends for a long time and we had worked together on a shorter film prior. When I asked Kirsten to shoot *Here One Day* I was really asking her to work *with* me, knowing that I could trust her to join me on the journey, even if I didn’t know exactly where we would be going. Working with Kirsten was really the first step in going public with this story. Opening up to her and to being received so lovingly, without judgment, made a huge difference in what we were able to do together on screen.

Our first shoot together was amazing. We projected slide images of my family onto my pregnant belly, using it as a screen and then filmed me with these images on my body in a dark hallway. We wanted to visually represent the way memories of individuals are passed down across generations, even to a baby in utero. It was beautiful and different than anything either of us had ever seen before. This set the bar high for all of the shoots that would follow.

Licata: I'm guessing you could say the same thing about the editor, trusting her, letting her into the process.

Leichter: Absolutely. I remember the day I brought my mother's suicide note into the edit room. This was the culmination of much of the film's narrative arc—what we had been building to. I wasn't sure I could include the note, but I knew the film would be better off for it. I'm not sure I had shown the note to anyone, not even my husband. Talk about a sacred piece of paper. So bringing it into the edit room and sharing it with Pola Rapaport, my editor, was a big step. She was so respectful. The note was in a manila envelope. Pola asked if she could look at it, if I wanted to be there when she looked, if I wanted her to take it out of the envelope for me. It was a moment of enormous trust between us that I was able to show the note to her. In that moment I made the decision that it had to be in the film. I knew I was ready, even if I was pushing myself a bit past my comfort zone. Editing the film was full of many such moments of baring my soul, sharing family dynamics, and trusting that this was good and OK.

Licata: You use home movies in the film very effectively. I'm using some as well, and I have to say, I find working with them emotionally difficult. I imagine editing this film was emotionally fraught.

Leichter: Actually the biggest surprise about editing this film was that it was incredibly fun! When people see almost finished versions of the film, they often look at me and my editor and say, "Oh, you poor things. It must have been so hard to make this film." But instead, it's been just the opposite. The film was about such a serious subject that Pola and I often needed a good laugh! We would crack jokes until we cried, finding the humor amidst the tragedies of family dysfunction, shattered dreams, and even suicide. I'd go back and do it all again if I could. It was such a blast.

Licata: There's a line early in the film that I love, "It's time for me to stop being the keeper of the Leichter museum." To me it says there's one last thing I have to do, make this film, and then I can let go. How much of this film was about exorcism.

Leichter: I love that line too. Many of us are keepers in some way of our family's story. Many of us hold the keys to our own museums, big or small. For me, this has been a real truth, since I live in the apartment where I grew up, which is full of things of the past. My grandparents were keepers and my parents, too.

The same way the film was a vehicle for me to face certain taboo subjects with family members, making *Here One Day* was also a way for me to approach memories, places, and objects that I was afraid to look at and yet that I knew I needed to examine to move forward. Would I have ever transferred the eight hours of Super 8 footage that lay buried in my parents closet had I not been making this film? Would I ever have showed my mother's suicide note to thousands of people if it weren't for this film? No. In making these objects public, they lost some of their power and sacredness, which I guess is what I wanted and needed. They would no longer hold such sway over me. I guess that's one kind of healing.

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[Making Peace With The Past](#) by Robin L. Flanigan

Excerpt:

“Kathy Leichter’s mother, Nina, used to dress up a mannequin in their Manhattan apartment as Bob Dylan. She would move a bust of Marie Antoinette that she’d found in someone’s garbage from the living room to the bathroom, or vice versa, depending on her mood. She was a prolific poet, and she loved rock and roll.

“She was unconventional and interesting and funny, and I liked that about her,” says Leichter, who was 7 years old when her mother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 1974. “But I didn’t feel completely safe. It didn’t seem like she had things under control, and I often felt like I had to be in charge.”

Leichter's father, a politician, was often away in Albany. Even when he was home, Leichter recalls, she felt as if her mother were “a balloon that might fly away at any second.” Sometimes her mother would leave the house late at night to hang out at her favorite radio station, and Leichter never knew when she would be back.

Leichter, now 45, learned not to lash out about that or any situation, because her mother would respond by withdrawing. Even with treatment, Leichter recalls, Nina never returned to the woman she thought of as her “real mother.”

In February 1995, exhausted and physically ravaged, Nina Leichter ended her life. Kathy Leichter was 28. Nearly a decade later, still trying to cope with the loss, the award-winning documentary filmmaker from New York City turned the lens on herself and those closest to her. She says *Here One Day* is her effort to make sense of what happened to her mother and to better understand their relationship over the years.

Leichter felt she had to explore the rage she felt toward her mother—for not being able to handle her life better, for not having better resources to help her through challenging times, for deciding to leave this world and her family behind. Even after Leichter was married and had children of her own, she felt jealous of people who still had their mothers around, or who’d had more stable mothers in their childhood.

“I needed to do something, and the making of the film has been a real journey for me,” says Leichter, who also saw a therapist and used multiple bodywork techniques, including chiropractic care, to help heal. “I have more of an understanding of who she was as a whole person rather than the person I needed her to be when I was a child.”

As a result, she has turned blame into sympathy for a woman who did the best she could under difficult circumstances. “I’m not a Buddhist, but I feel like saying, ‘This is just how things were,’” she says. “Maybe that’s acceptance. I feel more liberated, as if I’m not as weighed down. I’ve shifted ... into a place that’s healthier for me.”