

FAMILY AFFAIR - TOPIC SUMMARY

“THE ORDINARY RESPONSE TO ATROCITIES is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.” – Judith Herman, M.D.

Once sexual abuse survivors break their silence, they are often cast to the margins of society. This is not always the case for offenders. Incest is a taboo because it is not supposed to happen, but in fact it does. Studies from the National Crime Victimization Survey, Bureau of Justice, National Institute of Justice and the FBI show that nearly 25% of *all* women are sexually abused by someone they know during childhood – so family members are often implicated. FAMILY AFFAIR speaks to any number of people affected by sexual assault and those who can identify with what it means to be a survivor. Dr. Judith Herman, a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Director of Training at the Victims of Violence Program in the Department of Psychiatry at the Cambridge Hospital, states in her book FATHER DAUGHTER INCEST that the incestuous father and their families are made-up of a wide cross-section of society; including, but not limited to the unemployed, house wives, artists, lawyers, rabbis, priests and teachers – all from various ethnic backgrounds, religious affiliations and social classes. Incest, like rape, is a weapon of war. It is used as a display of power and dominance in the confines of prison, dark alleyways, and rural farmlands. Child sex abuse also occurs in seemingly safe cookie-cutter suburban homes, as well as the bedrooms of children living in the depressed neighborhoods of the inner city. Dr. Judith Herman also states in her second book TRAUMA AND RECOVERY that “[i]n the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story.” This act of uncovering the past has an empowering effect on the survivor. To that end, FAMILY AFFAIR works as an ally for the survivors, empowering them to confront the horrors of their past and to do so in a safe environment. One of my sisters said that she was looking forward to seeing the completed film – to hearing my father’s responses to questions she never felt safe asking him face-to-face and to do so in an environment where she knew he could not “get her.” This documentary intends to serve as a safe passage to recovery for women, girls and others who have survived sexual abuse.

FAMILY AFFAIR approaches this topic from a deeply personal and uncompromising vantage point – presenting to its audience a more complicated way to view child molesters and the, often times, ongoing relationship with their victim/survivors. Still, it is important to stress that this is not *just* a film about “incest.” It is also a portrait of a family that struggles with common issues we all face – from mental illness, race and membership, to isolation and abandonment. FAMILY AFFAIR reveals that no one is ever *just* a victim nor solely defined by what happens to them as a child. This documentary adds the shades of gray to what surviving means in a larger universal context. In so doing, I examine the ways my father capitalized on isolating my mother and sisters in a society that criminalized interracial marriages until the 1967 Loving v. Virginia

U.S. Supreme Court case, which made it unconstitutional for states to enforce anti-miscegenation laws. I also explore the failed legal response to domestic violence in the 1960s and 1970s, when there were virtually no support services or police protection for battered women – even fewer for a German-Jew (“nigger lover”) with bi-racial children living in states like Kansas and Kentucky. Mandatory arrest laws and restraining orders would not come into effect until the 1980s – a time when it was already too late for my mother and sisters to escape the isolation and terror they suffered at the hands of my father. Their story is a relevant and timeless one about resilience, surviving and having the capacity to accommodate a parent’s *unspeakable* atrocities in order to restore one’s fundamental longing for family.

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Please visit www.c-linefilms.com to read a full synopsis and view clips of the film.