

January 24, 2007

Wow, this is a great place

[...]

Grabbing our gift bag, including a beer glass (like I can take that on the plane), we went back to Main. I had been hearing the best things about this film *Red Without Blue* at Slamdance and I had arranged a ticket for the final screening at 9:30. After a quick drink with Chris Albrecht from AtomFilms (thanks for the beer, AtomFilms), I huffed it up the hill to the Treasure Mountain Inn where the screening was being held. I was introduced to the director and producers and, of course, the film's subjects and then slipped in to catch the screening.



This is the best film I have seen at the festival. The documentary follows the lives of identical twins, Mark and Alex, both of whom came out as gay at a very young age while living in small town Montana. They were inseparable, and were each given a color to wear when they were babies: Mark red, Alex blue. Eventually Alex decides that he wants to transition and starts to become Clair. [The

two siblings are pictured here.]

But this is just the tip of the iceberg. The twins have undergone a painful divorce, which leads to depression, drug abuse, and eventually a mutual suicide attempt by carbon monoxide poisoning. After the suicide, the two are sent to separate reform schools and do not speak for two years. They both

eventually attend college, Mark to SFAI, and Clair to Sarah Lawrence and they rediscover their relationship. However, Mark, as a twin, has a hard time accepting Clair, viewing her transition in some way as a rejection of himself. As the film progresses we learn that the two had in elementary school gotten involved with a 17-year-old pedophile who tried to take advantage of Clair, to some extent raped Mark, and raped a 10-year-old boy while Mark was present. The twins brought charges against him which were eventually dropped due to lack of evidence. We also meet the twin's mother, who for years refuses to accept Clair, while simultaneously being outside what she calls "labels," and living with her female friend in their lake house cabin being intimate in every way but sexual. (At the Q&A, Clair revealed that they thought their mother was to some extent bi-sexual and would be sexual with her friend if the friend would allow). But the mother describes the twins suicide attempt, in the beginning of the film, as the end of her twins saying, "They are not my children, they are just young people I know."

But this movie is not done yet. The filmmakers follow the twins for almost three years. Mark falls in love with a man named David, who he is with today, braving their relationship when Mark goes to Prague to study and David to Paris. Clair undergoes electrolysis of her face and genitals and Mark helps her get well. Clair gets a letter from a childhood friend in small town Montana who though once a Dungeons and Dragons playing boy named Ladd, is now Rachel and has undergone the bottom surgery already (showing the camera a photograph of her vagina two weeks later). They form a friendship that Clair describes as soul mates and Clair's mother takes Rachel into their family, which is a contributing factor to the fact that she comes around and begins to accept Clair.

All of this is packed into 77 minutes of film. The twin's mother breaks down saying she has failed as a wife and mother, the twin's father calls Clair pretty, completing her on a deep level and he pays for all her surgical procedures, including her eventual bottom surgery last October. At every step the filmmakers Brooke Sebold, Benita Sills, and Todd Sills capture an astonishing range of grey. No one is the hero, no one the villain, everyone in the film is struggling towards and eventually finds completion as a family. The relatively young age of the filmmakers may have worked to their advantage, with a kind of feeling driven narrative, taking us from one emotional moment to the next, slowly moving forward but sometimes opening up questions that are only truly answered later. They play with home video and family albums, mixing color and camera technique with a deft score. The twins are inherently shy (evident in the Q&A) but the

filmmakers manage to get them to talk out some of the biggest issues in their lives on camera.

The whole audience was crying, myself included. I have never seen a movie deal with the idea of being transgendered so well, and doing so on not focusing so much on the surgery itself. Brooke Sebold stated that it was never their intention to get to the surgery scene but Clair's date got pushed up so they felt they had to capture and include it. Like *Save Me*, and ***So The Bible Tells Me So***, this film is so effective because it is focused not on family, creating a rich and layered look at something so complicated. I hope this film finds distribution and fast.

I shook Mark and Clair's hand (Clair, though shy in person was personable, dare I say unintentionally flirtatious) and thanked them for sharing their story with me. I was so charged after the film that I decided to walk home.