

Arts & Entertainment



Film premiere of Common Threads September 15

Photo 2898 courtesy Shadow Lane Productions

This beach scene from New Hampshire forms part of the backdrop for Amber Ward's first feature length documentary film, entitled, *Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma*. The film tells the stories of two therapists, Connie Robillard and Marcel Duclos, and was filmed entirely in New Hampshire where they live and practice. The therapists had both been abused as children, and they talk about their traumatic experiences as well as how they've been able to move on with their lives. The film will premiere on Saturday, Sept. 15 at Southern New Hampshire University.

Weyburn native and emerging filmmaker Amber Ward will premiere her

Common Threads

first feature documentary about two individuals surviving child abuse

By GREG NIKKEL

The opening scenes to the film, *Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma*, show an idyllic scene of children playing beside the ocean on a peaceful beach in New England.

As the film title suggests, the peacefulness may be symbolic of life after trauma — but then the viewer is drawn in by the very personal stories of two adults, Connie Robillard and Marcel Duclos, who experienced abuse as children but have since learned how to overcome those traumatic times and move on with their lives as adults.

The two are colleagues as professional psychotherapists who practice with Eventide Counseling in New Hampshire, and have co-written a book of the same title that tells each of their stories with poetic interludes. The book is used in the seminars they put on for other mental health professionals, and with the documentary completed by Weyburn native Amber Ward, they have been provided with an artistic visual tool that will also be used in their seminars to professionals.

The daughter of Darryl and Patricia Ward of Weyburn, this is Amber's first feature length documentary through her production company, Shadow Lane Productions. Connie was a subject in a documentary about artists that Amber helped her mother-in-law produce. This is where the two met. Connie liked Amber's work so much she approached her to do the *Common Threads* documentary.

"When Connie approached me she wanted to do something a bit more educational. I felt that it needed to be done on a more personal level in order to touch or reach more people," said Amber. "I come from a very artistic background, and thanks to Connie and Marcel's trust, was able to infuse a lot of my artistic vision into the documentary. The entire piece has very beautiful, peaceful and reflective moments, which some people have said are therapeutic. One of the major reasons behind

doing this project was for Connie and Marcel to tell their story, encourage others to do the same and hopefully help on some level."

The film will premiere on Saturday, Sept. 15 at Southern New Hampshire University in Robert Frost Hall at 7 p.m. Amber and husband Jeremy Cleek, both producers and founders of Shadow Lane Productions, will be present for the premiere, showing, along with Connie and Marcel.

"Jeremy was not only a producer but sound designer and color timer as well, and a huge help," said Amber. "I could have never done this without him."

The book deals with a very serious, dark subject, namely that of child abuse, and Amber had to think of a way where they could present their stories, but also provide lighter points during the film to allow the viewer not to be overwhelmed by the stories.

Over taking part of the idea from the poetic images in the book of children playing by the ocean, Amber filmed a number of scenes using Connie's grandchildren on a beach in New Hampshire, and these serve as counter-points to the more serious moments when Connie and Marcel individually tell their stories — a process both authors admit was tougher than they thought it would be. (The children really represent innocence.)

"Connie was very open to it, and Marcel was a little more reserved. When he wrote the book, that was the first time he told anybody. To do that in all that time and then to do a book to give to your family was a big thing for him," explained Amber, adding, "They're amazing people."

"The film was more difficult (than writing about it). I recalled



AMBER WARD

Photo courtesy Michael Cirelli Photography, Londonderry, NH

how at first I spoke more circumspectly in the film, but when we showed a trial of the film to a group of colleagues, they said, 'you don't really say what happened to you.' I'm a very private person; I'm sure Amber had her hands full with me," said Marcel.

"It was much more difficult to do the film than to write about it, partly because we were telling our story to Amber and she was hearing it for the first time. It was very emotional," added Connie.

Marcel noted that Connie was the first one to start writing her story, and he encouraged her in it; she in turn asked why he doesn't share his story in a similar way, so he started writing his story as well.

With the film, he said he respects Amber's work and approach to making it, and hopes it can help people the same as their book has been able to do.

"We're just two real persons, nothing extraordinary. Trauma need not be the end of somebody's story," he said of the subject matter.

The film will be shown to a large conference of professionals in Illinois in early October, and Marcel notes both of them are excited at the quality and visual treats that are in this documentary. "We showed it to a number of professionals, and they said, 'this has to be seen, it's beautiful work.' I participated at first with some resistance, but once I got to know Amber, she was very respectful," said Marcel.

His main hope for the film is that it will argue against the belief in our culture that abuse is a taboo subject that's never discussed out loud, and as a result children are vastly undervalued.

"The abuse of children in the Western world is horrific. To this

day, I witness in my office people emotionally abusing their children right in front of me without any thought. If the film can argue against that, it would be wonderful," he said.

For her part, Connie believes they can reach more people with the film in their seminars than just by using the book, and it will touch both the professionals they often talk to and the general public as well.

"It's a beautiful piece of artistic work. It's an interesting film from a professionals' point of view, but also from an artistic point of view," she said.

In between the scenes where she or Marcel are talking, Amber has interspersed the scenes with Connie's grandchildren, which Connie thinks has provided a good contrast "with the dark reality of abuse."

The final result is a film that went beyond what she was expecting. "I had a dream inside of me for a film, but she took the film farther than the dream I had for it. I can't imagine anyone could have done a better job of it than what she did."

Connie Robillard has a Master's degree from Rivier College and has advanced training in Internal Family Systems Therapy, EMDR and Experiential forms of psychotherapy. Marcel Duclos has studied Pastoral Psychotherapy, Jungian Analytical Psychotherapy, Core Energetic Evolutionary Therapy, EMDR and Internal Family Systems Therapy.

After graduating from the Weyburn Comprehensive School, Amber went on to graduate from the Visual Communications program at Medicine Hat College, and the Vancouver Film School in B.C. Currently, Amber lives with husband Jeremy Cleek in Minneapolis, Minn., where both work for Tightrope Media Systems. To see a trailer for the film, visit the website www.shadowlaneproductions.com, and for more information about the counseling practice, go to www.eventidecounseling.com.



Filming a documentary scene

Film-maker Amber Ward gets low to film a scene on a beach in New Hampshire, to be part of her first feature documentary film entitled, *Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma*.

Photo 2897 courtesy Shadow Lane Productions

Brad Johner to perform on the CCMA awards show

Midale native Brad Johner is on a roll with his latest single, and will be performing live on national TV at the Canadian Country Music Awards Show on Sept. 10.

The country singer's newly-released single, *You Can't Beat An Original*, from his *Summer-Town Road* album, had the highest debut on the BDS/Mediabase chart at No. 40.

The single is also a "Hotshot" track on the *TraxReport* chart, jumping from No. 61 to No. 35.

With the CCMA awards com-

ing up in Regina, Johner has nominations in four award categories, including Single of the Year, CMT Video of the Year, Male Artist of the Year and Independent Male Artist of the Year.

At the awards show, he will perform his radio hit, *I'd Rather Be Lucky*, which is nominated for CMT Video of the Year, and Single of the Year, two of his award nominations.

The awards show will be broadcast nationally on CBC-TV on Monday, Sept. 10 at 8 p.m.

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Artists Degenhart and Eaglesham to have exhibits

A Weyburn artist and a former Weyburn resident and painter will both have shows at the Pacific Gallery in Saskatoon this fall.

Janis Eaglesham, the daughter of the late Fergus and Isabelle Eaglesham of Weyburn, will have her show at the gallery from Sept. 13 to Oct. 4, while Eltje Degenhart of Weyburn will have a show there on Nov. 8-27.

Eaglesham, who was born and raised in Weyburn, will have a show entitled, *Expressions and Impressions*, featuring landscapes, still life and figure paintings. Her earliest memories from

growing up in Weyburn are of summers spent at area lakes, especially White Bear and Carlyle Lakes, where she became fascinated by the interaction of water, land, trees and sky.

"Her work is very figurative and very well done," said Degenhart, who went to school with Eaglesham, and taught art at the Weyburn Comprehensive School for many years. "Her work is very immediate and very gestural. There's a lot of energy in her brushwork and it's very good work, I think."

Eaglesham studied drawing and design at the University of

Saskatchewan, and fine arts at Langara College in Vancouver. She is an active member of the Federation of Canadian Artists, and in August of 2004 won an Award of Excellence from the Fraser Valley Chapter. Currently she is a member of the Stave Falls Artist Group led by artist Ron Hedrick.

Degenhart's show is entitled, "Saskatchewan — Taking it Personally", and features his latest landscape work. He noted he was aware of Eaglesham's work as a painter before, and is excited she is now represented at the same gallery he is.

Of his own show, he said the prairie and its colours are an endless inspiration to him, and his new work will have a semi-abstract element to it.

Degenhart mainly paints landscapes from the southeast area of Saskatchewan, although some is from a trip he made to Canmore in the foothills west of Calgary.

Those who have seen his work will note some new trends in his latest work, of which Degenhart said, "I think the work's always evolving and changing."

To view examples of both Degenhart's and Eaglesham's work, go to www.pacificgallery.ca.