

An Interview with Claudia Lacy

Featured in 'Always in Season'

Interviewed by Natalie Bullock Brown and Molly Murphy

N: Thank you for being willing to sit down and talk to me on behalf of Working Films and have a conversation about your experience with Always in Season. If you would start by saying your name, telling us where you're from and how things developed. How did you meet Jackie and go from there?

C: My name is Claudia Lacy. I'm from Bladenboro, North Carolina. I met Jackie from a phone conversation that my son had with her. At the time, we had just dealt with the loss of my son, which was in the news because he was found in a predominantly white trailer park hanging and the authorities there quickly said suicide. As a mother, I'm like, you don't even have the first inkling of who he is as a person and you have not even talked to me. How dare you? I said "you don't know this person. So you're just gonna assume?" My thing is come and talk, find out who he is as a person, what his family was like. A person's demeanor changes when they go through suicidal tendencies. That's one thing that people don't seem to realize that I took. When they gave me that discovery, that's what they were gonna say it was a suicide. I'm like "No, it's not. It's not what you say it is because I'm his mother. I know." I said, "Therefore, you are gonna have to convince me. I can deal with anything. But this is not one of those things that I'm going to deal with or tolerate." The first thing I wanted to do because I was angry and upset in disbelief and appalled because of the simple fact...not my child, just because what was the reason for you saying suicide and you're not even knowing him because of his color, because of his social status. I wanted to know all the answers to those questions. No one was giving them to me. And I guess they just didn't expect me to ask those questions.

N: In the midst of you having to deal with the fact that you're being told what happened to your son, here comes Jackie. How did you think of her initially?

C: At first I was taken away, a step back from her, because I had been approached by so many other people saying I want to tell your story or I want to help you get it out, yadda yadda. It never happened.

/ My thing was her honesty and her realistically being truthful and forth worth and telling me what her initial job was as far as why she was there. She said, “I came across it because I was doing research over a period of time on lynchings.” When you’re in school as a high school student and in college, you do research. When you do research, there’s documentation. When you get documentation, that’s stuff that you can prove that it’s followed by paperwork, followed by proof of evidence. That’s really what made me initially say **she’s serious about what she does**. Maybe it will go somewhere. I prayed about it and said “Lord, if this is what you want me to do and this is the person that I need to be allowing to tell my son’s story, show me.”

/ The first thing she did was she initially took on the conversation of talking to the family, getting to know who Lennon was and I appreciated that because that’s something they did not do. I respected her for that. She was very kind and considerate, and respectful with that. She took time off to listen and not you know “we said, we heard...” No, she didn’t do any of that. She just listened genuinely. She wanted to know how we felt about it: Who was Lennon as a person? What was his ideals? What was his dreams? Who was his friends? What was his likes and dislikes? She wanted to know **him as a person**, and the only way you’re gonna get to do that is to talk to his family and his friends and that’s what she did. And I appreciated her for that. And that meant a lot to me.

N: So at what point did you feel like “okay, I think I can trust Jackie to not only represent me and my family but represent my son, and represent him and what happened to him in a way that is going to be valuable and also honorable to his memory.”

c: / She was a mother. I could look at her and tell her “This is my son. What if it was yours?” I gave her the question that I was stuck with. You are the mother. How would you want your son represented? How would you want this ordeal

to reflect your life? Because it is your life you could be telling. Because just like me, when Trayvon Martin was shot, 14 years old. I'm like he's a baby. I have four sons and I could not imagine his mother going through that. And I never thought in my lifetime that I would have to go and endure just the same, losing my child at an early age. Like I said, to another mother to sit there and have the opportunity for her to represent something that could have been just as easily, from Trayvon's mom to me, happen to her. And like I said, she was the best candidate. God sent her I felt because, like I said, that's the only way that you could've understood my pain, my anger, my anguish. The way it should've been represented and it is. She took it upon herself as a personal vendetta to represent a mother, her feelings, her child's life meant something more than just being a 17-year old black male in this America as we call it today. No, it's much more than that and she showed that in this documentary.

N: When you met Jackie, you were still grieving?

C: Yes.

N: The grieving process never ends.

C: No it doesn't.

N: So you're in the process of grieving. Lennon's death is still very fresh. You're having to navigate both the pain that you're feeling and then also beginning to be apart of this filmmaking process. How did you do that?

C: My faith. Because God allowed me to have the opportunity to express and feel and show someone how I felt and what it meant to go through that on a day to day basis. She could relate because she was a mother. To know that she had to get up everyday, get dressed, and make sure she had everything prepared for her son. I still had children in my home at the time. So, like I said, it was something that you cannot overlook but you have to look at and deal with everyday. Because you're dressing this child, you're sending him off to school. It doesn't mean he will come back to you. Therefore, you take in mind of being very careful, talking to them and telling him "Watch what you do. Call me if you need me. Make sure you have a good day and mind your teachers and watch out where you're going, crossing the street or whatever." Those things mean a lot. They may not mean a lot when you have not went through a tragedy like mine. But as

a mother, yes, the day to day things that you do and would take for granted, you don't anymore. You have to take it in account "Am I doing the right thing. Am I telling them what is right will keep them safe?" You think about that now. You really do. Because at that point, you have to let go and let your faith...Once your door closes and you two are not right there in the same space where you can see, touch, and feel them, you have to trust and stand on something bigger than you to allow that to happen and not wanna grab them and hold them and say, "You're not going out there today." I was terrified every time my kids went out the door. Believe me I was. But it's just the thing God allowed me to know that there was somebody watching over them and there was somebody, if something was to happen, there was another mother that could tell the story.

N: That's powerful, thank you. How do you feel now that the film is done? It's being seen all over the place. I'm not sure about all the festivals but I know it was at Sundance and it's being seen [at Full Frame]. I've seen social media posts by Jackie where she says where the film is gonna be. How does it feel to know that your family's story and Lennon's story in particular is being seen far and wide? What sort of impact do you want it to have?

C: By it being seen, it's being kept in the light where you can keep an eye on history because that's what it is. It's history. It's a part of our life. It's a part of our DNA. The documentary connects his life with our past. By our children not knowing where we come from to where we're going is a big gap there. They need to know that they need to take advantage of all the time that they have and make it count because they are the ones that are making our future. They're the ones that are making the ones that can change these laws. They're the ones that can change the way we live and look at each other as individuals. The way she connected the story, I want it to affect the kids in so much of a way where they start having the communication "Well why didn't they check this and why didn't they ask these questions?" This is what I want to happen because the kids that were surrounded in his life, they asked me those questions. They looked at me and said, "We're not giving up, we know better. We can't say it. We don't know how. You have to represent us and start the conversation for us and we will follow suit." This is what I want this documentary to pursue, to keep them in the light and let them know you can speak out and speak up on what you feel is not right. You have that right. Your voice is strong, and it's important too. These kids that he went to school with, they came to me and said, "Ms. Lacy, we know. Lennon was not like that." I know they were right because I know my son. But for them to be very adamant about certain things and I was like, "Ok. Alright. We're gonna work on this. As long as you've got my back, I've got yours." When they had to go and do that game that he missed out on because he lost his life, this is the comment that was made: "We're in it for Lennon to win it." So, this is where I'm at right now.

That was their logo to win and play that game that day and that night. The first game of the school year, they won it. But that was their intention to not give up on him because they know he would not have wanted them to stop and not have that game. They knew him just that well. My son was a go-getter and they knew him. I was like “Well, I just have to go with the flow cause that’s what they want and that’s what I’m gonna do.”

N: You’re bringing up, in talking about the kids that were Lennon’s friend, the community that was at his school, and the neighborhood. How did you feel, especially early on in the filmmaking process... Did you feel any tension or concern about how Lennon’s friends, the community, people who were not necessarily in touch with Jackie would feel about somebody who’s not from Bladenboro, someone from the outside... “How can you let this person tell this story?” Did you ever feel that sort of tension between your community and what Jackie was trying to do?

C: I did. I really did. There were a lot of people that said “The authorities have done all they could do and they’ve proven that it was suicide. Let it go. We just want to forget it and go on. You know just forget about it and let it die down. Forget about it.” I’m like you cannot because it’s a part of history. This is history repeating itself. You cannot forget about it. You cannot put it in the closet and just pretend like it’s not there because it is. There are things that you did not do that you should have done. My thing is this right there. For you to allow this to happen in your neighborhood and to be so quick to say forget about it. There’s something there, something wrong. When the FBI and the SPI came to talk to me, they were very adamant about certain things that they wanted me to see or say or to agree upon like “These are his belongings.” I said, “I know my child, I know what he had on. You cannot sit here and try to make me say something that is not true. You cannot make me agree to something I know you haven’t proven or shown me. Therefore, until you can show to me and prove it to me, you keep digging and imma keep saying no until I know for a fact this is stuff that you can look at and you can stand on it and say well this is...show it to me, reenact it, re-demonstrate it, show me step by step what happened and when it happened because suicide is very, very simple.” My thing is this right here. The way they did this, they wouldn’t give me no kind of police report and they said until the case is closed. I said “Well when you determined it was suicide, it was closed. So, why can’t I get a police report?” I didn’t even get one. I never got a police report. My lawyer got one but he got the coroner’s report. I wanted the questions, the people they talked to, I wanted all of it. “Who did you talk to? Who did you interview for this and that and this?” They gave us a list of things that they wanted us to look into. And I’m like, well if we’re doing the work, how do we know you’re following up on what we ask? We have questions and things that we want asked. “Did you go ask this person? Did you go

talk to this person?" I'm looking in the neighborhood, there are people that are coming up to me that I don't even know. I'm in CVS in the line getting a case of water with my two grandchildren. This lady I don't even know came up to me and said "Honey, I just want to hug you and shake your hand. She said God knows who did what they did to you son and we know he did not do that." I don't know this woman from Adam. This is why the things that happen, the reason it's pushing me. We don't need anyone from the outside coming in and telling us how to do our job. Yes, you do because you didn't do it right. If a plain, complete stranger can look at me and follow the story that you put out in the media and can come up to me and tell me... they don't know me or my son from Adam... Just by looking at what you put out there, they're saying they know. Therefore something is wrong with this picture. And I'm not the only one saying it. They're saying it because they know. The only thing about it that bothers me is we had an open church conversation with lawyers, and police officers were there to take statements.

It was a situation where two witnesses came up to give a statement. These two witnesses disappeared right after the meeting at the church. I don't think Jackie documented it but it was a very open meeting and it was very intense because these two people came in and they were very well...We secured them with the people that we had there as far as security was concerned. The lady was trembling and shaking. She was so upset and distraught because she had already been threatened by the police. There were people that wanted to come forth like the kids when we had the march. They couldn't come out. If you noticed in the documentary, there are adults, there are no children, there are no teenagers. You don't see any mothers, you see elderly, maybe third and second generation grandmothers. You never see any families at the march. That's where you see there is something wrong. That's when you can tell there's something being covered up. If there was one community standing on something that was right, they would have been out to see it. But this was wrong, so they did not support it. They can look at it the opposite way but I look at it that way. If it was something positive on a positive realm, you would want to be apart of that. But this was negativity so you pulled away from it. You can call it what you want to, standing against or not being with. Volumes are numbers. If you don't have the numbers, something is wrong with that picture.

N: I hear you. Looking back at the whole process, is there anything that you would do differently? In terms of everything from maybe even opening yourself up to the story being told. Are there things you wish you had said to Jackie or the filmmaking team. Is there anything that you in retrospect feel like wow, I wish we could do that differently? I wonder what sort of impact that would've had on the final product.

C: To tell you the truth, yea. I wished if I could've started at the beginning. The day he decided to go out that door. I wish he wouldn't have went out the door. I'd still have my son. That being said since he did, I also wish... If I could change anything, the police officer that came upon the scene would've thought about it "This could be my son" or "This could've been my child" because the way they handled it was as though it was just another typical black man. Period. Being discarded in society. They never took a personal step to say, "This is somebody's child, somebody's husband" They didn't know and they didn't take it as though they did. They didn't care. It was just a dead body and they wanted to get rid of it. Being more compassionate about your fellow human being is one thing that you should never step away from, whether death or in life. And the way that they handled the situation, I didn't like it. Because like I said, it was appalling to me. These were my peers, my age. I'm walking up to identify my son and it was such an eerie feeling of "Hurry up and get rid of this scene, let's go. We need to wrap this up." Really, literally they were wrapping up the crime scene tape when I walked up on the scene. And like I said it was a rush. "Let's do this and get it over with." If I could go back and rewind all of that, that's where I'd want to start. Keeping him from going out the door. But since he did, I did and would have loved to have known that there was someone out there with some compassion for their fellow man and there wasn't. It was just a rush to hurry up and get rid of scene.

N: So, given that experience that you just described, was there ever a time where you felt like wow, I don't really want Jackie to talk to the police. I don't really want her to reach out to... I don't want her to talk to Michelle. I don't want her to talk to the Sykes. I don't want her to talk to any of these people. Did you ever have a conflict of emotions knowing on the one hand that perhaps there were certain things that, as a filmmaker, she was gonna have to do but at the same time, given what you were going through, that it just made it difficult for you to separate the process of the filmmaking and your part in it from what you were living day to day?

c: To tell you the truth, **I felt that Jackie was the exact person they needed to have them come talk to. She had compassion. She had very personal detach from the police authority figures where they're not threatened. She was very humble but she was very clear about who she was and what she was doing. So she made them feel comfortable to say what they did and talk the way that they did without having any regrets about saying anything.** They felt comfortable. They could say whatever they wanted to and felt that it wasn't going to be a threat against them. They felt comfortable, and she was the very person they needed to do that.

/ She got more out of questioning these people than the reports that I got. I didn't hear any of this from the police. All I heard was their final decision. **What you saw in the movie was more than I got from the authorities.**

It was compassion, it was honesty, and it was clarity. These people said exactly what was on their mind and I appreciated that. Even though it's harsh to hear some of the stuff. The documentary tells who did what. It's a who-done-it. And the who-done-it has told... Like I said, they stood out and they stood up and they said what was on their mind. They told the truth. If you could see the documentary, it tells you exactly from point A to point B what happened. She was the exact person that they needed to talk to, to get it all out. They were holding and just needed someone to pull it out or to make them feel comfortable enough to where they could just release it. That was a part of my process. The thing was holding it in and not having a voice to be able to stand and tell it. That's what bothered me. It angered me to a point, but like I said, all things come in God's way and his time and I knew it. Like I said, my relationship with Christ is very deep and focused. I don't do anything without praying and asking him for guidance. And when they were going through Mike Brown's and Trayvon's... all of this stuff over the country... there are all these young black men being killed. Black lives matter. Everybody was pushing, pushing: "Well, when are they gonna do something with Lennon's story? When are they gonna do something with Lennon's story?" I said God said it's not time and they were like "I don't know how you can..." I said because I am a child of God first. I listen to what my God sends me. I said he hasn't sent me any signs to say it's time to jump up and do whatever. I don't want him to be a speculation. Something that is here today and gone tomorrow.

When you see Lennon's story, I want you to know this was something that was deadly, seriously wrong in a community that was so small and compacted enough where kids weren't allowed to attend a very very popular young black man's funeral recession, his celebration to justice because like I said they were not there in numbers at the march but they were there in his celebration to death to take him to his final resting place. Those kids were there. His football team members...they were the ones that carried him in the church. They were the ones that carried him out the church. They were the ones who placed him at the gravesite. His body in his casket. But when it came time to do that march in Bladenboro, those children did not have the opportunity to come out and voice their feelings and their emotions. They were held back because of their age and their parents and their parents beliefs. Now that they are older, trust me I see them. They call me to keep in contact. They let me know. And when his grave was desecrated, the police department (scoffs), the chief came to me "Um, talk to your family." I said,

“Excuse me? You have no idea how large his family is because are you talking blood family or are you talking about the family he connected with when he went to school. Because he had friends that were at school that were more like family than his cousins. They would come and check on Lennon: “You got a ride? What you having for lunch? You got lunch money?” I mean it was just like that with him. These kids, they would just pick him up from school, drop him off or whatever. His friends were really close-knit...they were a very close-knit group. Those kids raised money to help me pay for his funeral recession. They brought bracelets with “Win it for Lennon,” sold them at the games and gave me the proceeds to go towards paying for his funeral recession. And I’m like that’s a family. That’s what family does. These were kids. When we did that march, you didn’t see too many children there. If you look at the documentary, you don’t see the kids out like that.

N: I wanted to ask just a few more questions. The first one is: How did you feel when you first saw the film?

c: / **It was like walking back in history. I mean walking back in the past, taking it as that day that it happened.** The part where I was standing in the doorway. It was as though I was watching the police chief come to my door all over again. After that part, I remember going to the crime scene and having to identify my son. It was oh so real and I was like “This is a dream. This is not real. When am I going to see?” I didn’t know until I got to the EMTs.

/ Just like this documentary, I didn’t know the outcome of what she was gonna do, how she was gonna do it. But once I saw it, it was like a relief. A release because I had been holding it. I didn’t know how else to share it with anyone. Before I even saw the documentary, I wrote a book *An Anticipating Wait*, that was the title of it. It was about Lennon as a person. I didn’t write about what happened to him. I wrote about the day he was born, the day he was brought home, the way his birth affected our family, and I wrote about how his name came about me naming him Lennon Lee Lacy. The ghostwriter that wrote it for me, he had initially saw and met me in Charlotte. He said Ms. Lacy you need to get you a journal and write down your feelings, write down your thoughts. He said “Think about writing a book.” We had talked for six months before he even talked to me or mentioned writing a book to me. The documentary is just what that book states *An Anticipating Wait*, and also *Always in Season*. We are. History shows that we have always been in season. To be discriminated against. To be held back, not knowing where or what our future or past was. Not knowing self worth of knowing what your value as a human being in your

process of getting from society's label that they've stuck on us and branded us with for over the years. Our children need to identify with that so we would know that we are able and we are capable of being the leaders that we were. Kings and Queens over thrones, over thousands of soldiers and warriors, strong, vibrant heritage. Our children don't have that. We have no clue, our children, not unless we do research. There's not a lot of it that we can go back and find because it's been destroyed. It's been covered up. But this is a start. This is a start for them to start talking about " Well why can't we go back and find our heritage? Why can't we link our lives with where we are today in society?" It's just a big mystery to me of why would you want to close that book? Because it's a lot out there for those children to offer the world. You don't know if there's one out there that can cure cancer. It is just amazing to me how you want to just cut off a generation of people and allow them to just be used as product, to process, but not to promote, reproduce, and create new, better, and bigger things to make the world a better place.

N: I guess the last question that I want to ask is... Well, two. Do you feel like going through the process of working with Jackie on the film and then it finally coming out has helped in your healing process?

c: / I've said that this is my healing process. It is. It allows me to let go and let people know how I felt, where my feelings were. I couldn't scream. I couldn't give up. I couldn't break down and let go because his story would have never gotten told. It would have been lost with my emotions, with my breakdown. When you go through something this traumatic, you're supposed to breakdown. You're supposed to be in a fetal position somewhere. My faith would not allow me to do that. I could look back in the Bible and relate to Christ, him being crucified, him being drug through the streets. Who was I to have the right to cry and moan when we did that to our Creator? This right here. We could never endure what his mother endured, but she already set the tone for us to be able to go through the process. It was there where I had to dig deep and ask Christ to show me how and get it out and do it. And I did. He answered my prayers, and he allowed me to get the strength that I needed to walk through it, to process it because of his sacrifice that he made for all of us. That's how I relate. That's how I get through it. That's how my healing comes about.

N: That was very powerful...what you're saying. The last question I want to ask. Although I could sit here and talk to you all day. The last question I want to ask. Was there anything? Forgive me if I asked this already.

Was there anything you wish that Jackie and her team would've done differently? I think I asked you if there was there something you would have done differently. But is there something you wish they would've done differently? From beginning to end.

C: I wish they would've came on the scene earlier, because there would've been a lot of things that she would've captured that they threw away, that they didn't look at. They didn't take a second thought about. She would have. Because she would've been thinking, "This could be my son." This is something that might be used to answer the questions that are not being asked. I know for a fact just looking at all the detail and the careful process that they put into this documentary was something that was very carefully looked at and thought about and heart taken. You know everybody put a piece of their personal feelings and their professional craft into this. It wasn't something that was thrown together. That's why I said I wish they would've come in the beginning cause there would've been a lot of things that would've been shown and told.

N: Thank you very much.

M: I guess the only other question I have is: You talked about what the film can do and I know Jackie has talked to organizations that are working around the history of lynching and lifting up how it's still happening today. It's a historical terror that has faced black people in this country. Did Jackie ever talk to with you about what y'all both want the film to do? It's been a process of grieving and healing for you. Then you also want it to be something... I guess did you come together in your vision for how the film would be out in the world?

C: I told her that my thing is I want the young kids to be able to have a platform for communication for the understanding of racism. They don't understand what it means, where it comes from, or why it was so violently put into society. Why it is the way it is. They need to start talking about that and not feeling so self-absorbed about being afraid to talk about it or how to talk about it, how to bring up the conversation at least. A lot times, it's not being brought up. My thing is this right here - we all can be slaves for something or someone but they don't bring up the conversation. It's not even taught up in school. They don't even talk about slavery in school with our children. I have four grown children. God bless and rest my son Lenny, he didn't go through that. But I did teach my kids "You need to know what you come from. Even the bad things because it helps you be a better person. It lets you appreciate the little things in life that you take for granted like reading, your education. Living in a decent home. That was all sacrifice by someone else for you to get here. Don't take it lightly." But our children

don't know that. They're not taught that in school every year, every day. When I allow my grandchildren to do black history, I always give them a little extra. The teacher may give them an assignment. I'll give them a little extra, something that is not in the history books. Something that's not taught in the schools that I know that they don't know. And I'll be like "Ask your teacher can you share it with the class for Black history month." A lot of them do agree to it. But my granddaughter came back to me one day and she's like "My teacher said it's not part of their academic curriculum and that she could not allow it to be read or shared with the class." I was appalled and taken back. I said "Really? See this is what I'm saying. You still read that book and if you want to do some extra research, we can. And when it comes time to do your report, do your report on that. And we'll see what kind of grade you get." My thing is with this right here: You will never ever not know where you come from or know something extra because we do give extra. Because we are the race that was forgotten and not thought about as giving a plus or a positive in our society. So, you will know extra. You will know where you come from. Why you got the position where you have it now, like teachers, scientists, and doctors. I even introduced her to a psychologist. My granddaughter had never saw a black psychologist or a psychiatrist in her life. These are women, black women. The woman I introduced her to, she was short lady. She was no taller than my granddaughter at the time. She was looking at all the degrees she has on her wall. I said, "You can do this. You could be this way." She said, "I want to own a Burger King." She wanted to own... I said, "No baby, you don't want to own one. You want to have a franchise. We don't want to own just one, we want a franchise." She said, "That's right, Grandma. Keep teaching." I said, "I will." But like I said, those are the things that I want my grandchildren to know, to reach for. Where things like this, these are the things I want this documentary to... tools the kids can use to get to where they need to be, information that would allow them to become scientists, lawyers, doctors, if they choose to. If you don't, in the community, show them where they can go get it from, how to go about getting it, their SATS, their grades. All of that means you will not be able to get a scholarship if your grades are not met at the level that you need to have it. This needs to be starting. They learn computers like this. But my thing is: Are you keeping those grades where you're gonna have them to get a scholarship? No, by the time you get into Middle School, you've already lost that because it's not pushed. It's not demanded on you. You have to keep looking and keep pushing them to let them know "Don't keep doing this, you're not going to get where you want to be." You have to keep showing them new things, like for instance the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, the businessmen that own their own business. Like Nike, Michael Jordan. I told my son "It's okay to play basketball, but you get you a back up plan. Being a physician, physical therapy is a plus when you're a football player. They get hurt, there goes the dollars. You can teach them how to read, be rehabilitated, how to use their muscles all over again if and when they get hurt. If you get hurt, you'll have a back up plan.

Never just plan on one thing. Have other things that you can do too.”

N: Thank you. Anything else? Any other questions?

M: I’ve also known Jackie for like 10 years and just love her approach as a friend. I do. I have a friendship with her and she mentioned something earlier. She came in as a professional. What did Jackie do that made you...? You felt like she’s a mother. Did you feel that she opened up to you in a way that made you comfortable to open up?

C: That was all on her. I guess whenever she asked about my son, like now, I’m getting very emotional. She could sense that when you’re a mother, you’re a protector. You don’t want to see your child hurt or going through any of these bad things in life. You try to protect them, but you can’t always because you can’t be there 24/7, 365. You just pray that you taught them everything that you need to, to keep them safe. But things do happen. She related to that because her son leaves her everyday and goes to school just like mine did. You only pray and hope that you’ve given them the tools that they need to survive and make it back home. When she allowed to let me know that she had a 17-year old and that she was also a single-mother, she could relate because there is something there, that bond between a mother and a child, that you never leave. It never leaves you and you never forget it. My sons right now are in Northern Virginia. If one of them got sick today or tomorrow and they didn’t talk to me, I could sense it. Something’s not right in the universe they say, but it’s a mother thing. It really is. Once you connect with your child, with the honesty, being open, talking, and building a relationship with your children, you keep that forever. That’s what she connected with.

/ I could see her and her son had a relationship, as a mother and a son. That’s where she bonded with me. She didn’t really have to tell me. When she shared she had a son. I was like “How would you feel, really?” I could see it in her face. The horror... or even the blankness because she was like “I never thought about it.” But I put the question out there, and to look at the expression on her face, I knew then she could tell the story without even hesitating to be pushed back away from asking these questions that needed to be asked. She wanted to know also by being a mother.

N: One question. It's important because it pulls together some of the things that you were talking about, in terms of your experience. I do think that this is essential. The question is: Do you have any advice for someone else who may... they don't necessarily have to have had something traumatic happen... What would you say to other people who may be approached about being in a film and telling their story? What would you share? What kind of advice would you give them in terms of how to even think about whether or not to open up to a filmmaker?

c: / Depending on the surroundings of the situation as far as someone coming to you, asking to tell your story, depending on what it is... An individual has to be sincere about how serious they are about letting people know how they want to be portrayed in their event or what happened to them. As clear as you can be and as up front and honest as you can be, that's the way they're gonna see it, they're gonna perceive it that way. If you don't give it that way, you're not going to get it back. You have to be honest with these people and let them know, "Look...this means a lot to me. It devastated my life." When you show it, I want to make sure that people see it as it is devastation but also getting back to [sound] recovering from it and learning from that. You being honest and telling your story is something that's important. People need to know just how you feel. They're not gonna know how to help you if you don't be honest and straightforward with them.