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## Interview with Benita Sills, Co-Director of *Red Without Blue*

By: [Kathleen J. King](#) ([View Profile](#))

Benita Sills talks about her experience co-directing *Red Without Blue*, a story about family, gender, identity, and twinship. *Click [here](#) to learn more about Red Without Blue and to view clips of the movie.*

**Q: What inspired you as well as Brooke Sebold and Todd Sills (co-directors) to tell this particular story?**

**A:** Brooke introduced us to Mark Farley who was at the time a new housemate in her San Francisco apartment. Brooke and Mark were becoming close friends, and we soon realized that Mark was in a very unique situation as an identical twin of a transgender sister. We each had our own reasons for being attracted to their story. I had recently met a few transgender people in San Francisco, and admired them very much for their courage. I was excited to explore the topic of identity, and I thought that Mark's experience would be an illuminating perspective to include.

**Q: You handed the camera to Mark and Clair for several scenes. Talk about your decision to have the subjects film themselves.**

**A:** In one scene, Mark and his boyfriend are having a conversation while in bed together. Their conversation is candid and incredibly intimate. This is an example of something that a documentary filmmaker would have a lot of difficulty in capturing as a third party in the room—if they were ever allowed to enter in the first place. In the last scene of the film, Mark films Clair as she prepares to go into surgery. On this momentous day, Clair wanted only her family close to her, and we didn't want to be intruders. I think that giving the camera to the subjects on these days really achieved the honesty that sometimes is compromised by the presence of a film crew.

**Q: What was the biggest challenge in making such a personal documentary about family?**

**A:** I was frequently worried that the family would be hurt by our portrayal of them. I worried that they might

have reason to regret their involvement, or that in the process of shooting the film we might cause damage that would last beyond the documentary. Luckily, I think that it was this collective concern that prevented those things from happening. Todd, Brooke, and I took our roles very seriously, and we understood that we had great potential to cause harm in the making of the documentary. At the conclusion of the film, the family expressed their gratitude to us and thanked us for bringing them closer together as a result of our filmmaking. This is probably our greatest source of pride.

**Q: At the end of the film, Mark talks about how he learned a lot about Clair and the rest of his family through the documentary, that everyone “heard each other more.” Is this something you noticed too?**

**A:** When we were fundraising, we made a twenty- minute “trailer” of the film at its current stage. We were still early in the shooting, but there was enough content to show where we were headed. The family members were shown this cut, and they were surprised by some of the things they saw. Jennie had said things to the camera that she would not have told the twins directly, which helped them to understand where she was coming from. Likewise, she heard Clair explain her decision to transition in a way that she had not heard before, which softened her criticism a little bit. In some ways, our process had the unintended effect of being a therapeutic tool for the family.

**Q: How did you raise the necessary funds to make this film?**

**A:** We received a grant from Frameline, the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. We approached our families, who were very generous, and then we approached our community at large, holding fundraisers in San Francisco, Tucson, and Missoula. We were able to make this documentary without hiring many other people, and we did not pay ourselves, which resulted in our incredibly small budget compared to most documentaries.

**Q: Who has been your biggest influence as a filmmaker?**

**A:** Ira Glass produces a radio show called *This American Life*. It may be ironic that a radio show is my biggest influence as a filmmaker, but sometimes the structure and the content stick with you more than the images associated with a story.

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