

Some Q and As on CAT LADIES with director, Christie Callan-Jones

What's your doc about - in 10 words or less?

An intimate looking into the life of four cat ladies.

How'd you first hear about the story?

The origins of film came from Suzanne Mullett, the associate producer, who is over 30 and has cats. She was fed up with being called a cat lady, a label she felt unjustly dismissed her and women who don't conform to society's expectation that women should be married with children. She decided to explore what was behind the label and after two years of research she was approached by the producers Sally Blake and Jeannette Loakman to explore the idea further in a documentary. Jeannette and Sally were also at the time really interested in working with me and the fit seemed to be serendipitous. From this point on the film started to happen. Like many people we've all had a notion of what a cat lady is and to be able to reveal the reality of their lives and stories is what we wanted to achieve and hopefully we did our cat ladies justice.

Is it a mostly female phenomenon?

There are cat men but they are perceived as eccentric whereas cat ladies are labeled crazy. Women have traditionally been associated with cats and men with dogs. It's the mystery, beauty and independence of cats that women find fascinating.

How close did you get to your subjects?

I got to know the subjects very well and still maintain contact with them. I wouldn't have been able to have as much access as I did if the subjects didn't trust me. It's always important to have a close relationship with your subjects so that the story you ultimately tell is true to their experiences.

Have you shown the subjects the film?

The subjects have seen the film and their reactions are what you expect of anybody who appears on film. They're not concerned about being seen as cat ladies but more how they appear and how their houses look.

If you remade your film as a drama, who would star?

Kathy Bates as Margot. Anne Hathaway as Jenny. Jeanne Moreau as Diane. Brigitte Bardot as Sigi.

What does a house with 100 cats smell like?

Intense. Like having your head inside a litter box but not the clumping kind.

Documentary god you'd like to meet?

Albert Maysles. I would like to compare notes with him on how he worked with Big and Little Edie in Grey Gardens.

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What would you say to him/her?

How did you get the smell off your clothes Albert?

What was your favourite scene that didn't make the final cut?

My favourite scene did make the cut - when Sigi is trapping and cuts her hand then pours coffee on it to clean it. Classic.

What doc subject would you never touch?

Outside of Cat Ladies, I've done pornography, obesity and death. There's not much visceral that I wouldn't touch.

Last doc that made you laugh?

Anvil! The Story of Anvil

Cry?

Anvil! The Story of Anvil

What do you hope people say as they're leaving the theatre?

Hopefully people will say, "that was a fabulous film and I must tell all my friends to see it".... failing that, "what's wrong with being a cat lady?".