

FEATURES

The Best Kept Secret:

Filmmakers explore dark side of human sexuality

Paula Todd

Two figures shift beneath the sheets; the man slips off the still body of the woman with him in bed. He stands, dresses and looks into the angry eyes of his partner. He is a father and she is his daughter.

This is the first, startling scene of a ten minute social drama soon to be released from the York Film Department. Three second-year film production students have collaborated on this their ninth and final class assignment, a film titled *The Best Kept Secret*. And the secret, of course, is incest.

Marshall Golden, the director and co-writer of the film, developed the idea for their project in consultation with his mother, Judith Golden. She is a marital and sexual therapist with a Toronto practice who has become a leading figure in incest counselling.

Technical perfection

Marshall chose to work with two other classmates, Alexander Van Ihinger who co-wrote the script and edited the film, and Kathy Smith who worked as the Director of Photography. Discussing his contribution to *The Best Kept Secret*, Van Ihinger said, "Beyond achieving technical perfection with the medium, I was concerned that the situation look as real as possible. We did not want the audience aware that they were watching a film." Kathy Smith added, "Our film is worthwhile. I like comedy. I want to entertain. But at this point in my life if I had a chance between working on this film and working on a comedy I would want to do this."

Succinct portrayal

Beyond the first disturbing moments of the film, the material presented comprises a succinct portrayal of the typical incest family. Therapist Judith Golden acted as the script consultant; outlining the characteristics of the family members most likely involved in

these situations. And she worked with the actors on the set. "I tried to help them understand the way each member of the family would react under those circumstances," said Ms. Golden. The roles were sensitive and difficult, especially for non-professional, volunteer performers. "They did a fine job of portraying the family and I believe the film is an accurate representation of a typical incest case."

Incest myth

"We wanted to give the impression that this could be happening anywhere, in any income group," said Van Ihinger. Ms. Golden said the decision to depict a middle-class or upper middle-class family in the film was an important one. "The stereotype is that incest occurs largely in lower income families. But the myth developed because lower class families must take their problems to public agencies while wealthier families can afford to deal with their problems - if they decide to seek professional help - in privacy."

The celluloid family lives in a well-furnished, middle-class home. The father is a business suit executive, and the mother an active housewife. The two female children are both in school. Everything about this family appears normal—they bicker, watch television, eat breakfast noisily around the kitchen table - except we know that the father has been sexually abusing his eldest daughter for six years.

Sexual imprisonment

Now eighteen-years-old, the daughter despises her father and faces the ultimate struggle: leaving the family and the abuse behind. *The Best Kept Secret* is a record of this young woman's triumph over her sexual imprisonment.

"What is most important," said Ms. Golden, "is the way the

film ends - with the telling of the secret." Ms. Golden refers to the point in the film when the mother overhears her daughter and husband arguing about their sexual relationship. "The mother in the film is typical too. She is faced with a decision and she sees that there is a choice to be made as to which member of her family to believe. More often than not, the mother will choose to side with the father - her husband. If there has been aggression and hostility in the father-daughter relationship she may use this as proof for her decision."

Parental betrayal

In *The Best Kept Secret*, the mother, after hearing the daughter's accusation - "he fucks me, he screws me" - implores, "How can you say something like that? He's your father." This final parental betrayal jets the daughter out the door - possibly forever.

"The women run away or they move out. But they rarely tell their mothers," reports Ms. Golden. Marshall admits that the mother *accidentally* overhearing the father-daughter discussion was a dramatic technique. "We wanted to explore as many reactions on the screen as possible." In real life, however, the daughter is often alienated from both parents.

Jealous father

"There are other ways for incest to end," added Golden, "sometimes conflict between the daughter's boyfriend and the jealous father provokes exposure of the relationship. The father does not want the daughter to move away from home. These are the types of problems which arise as the daughter tries to have adult relationships."

Because of the nature of the problem, incest is often well-hidden from other family members and from the community. A film like *The Best Kept Secret*, even at a short ten



The cast between takes: (L-R) Nora Young, Jennifer Van Ihinger, Joe Power and Marlene Weller.

minutes, is a substantial contribution to public awareness. "Teenagers and kids need to talk about incest. Presently there are no 'discussion starters'. Teachers often do not know how to introduce the subject even though there is bound to be at least one person in the class affected by it." As *The Best Kept Secret* eerily points out: one in every ten women is a victim of incest.

Psychological damage

Ms. Golden believes the film, therefore, will be useful in high schools and hopes to take it with her as a teaching aid when she travels to Waterloo this summer. "This film brings incest out into the open - something that had to be done sooner or later," she explained. "The longer a woman remains in an incestuous relationship the worse the psychological damage."

The three filmmakers began work on *The Best Kept Secret* last December and will finish sound mixing and editing in time for its April 22nd screening. They had a \$400 budget which they overspent by \$100 and had to raise all the money themselves. They shot 1,000 feet of film; 800 feet of which will remain on the cutting room floor.

The final presentation is a tight, incredibly subtle exploration of a very serious social problem. Their work informs and provokes: keep your eye on these three.

Free screening

The Best Kept Secret and other student films from the class will be screened April 22nd, at 7:30 pm. in Curtis Lecture Hall "L" in the Ross Building. The admission is free.

Chowdown:

No chefs spoil a broth

The Dining Duo

What is the result when two lawyers open a restaurant without a chef? Well, something like *Bobby Jo's*. Manager Brian Light says *Bobby Jo's* is the restaurant of the future. If Mr. Light is correct, the future of dining is not very bright. *Bobby Jo's* is part of the former converted Pop City factory on Mel's Mile (Finch between Keele and Dufferin) where it shares a parking lot with *Pappy's*, although it is a separate entity.

Business brisk

We dined at *Bobby Jo's* on Monday night. It wasn't packed, but business was brisk. Most people were drinking but few were eating. This should have made us wary, even though we were told the place always fills at lunch.

Pleasant music

The decor is exposed wood and brick; a pseudo-Mr. Greenjean's. The music was pleasant. It was not too loud, but the manager told me later that the volume increases as the medium-sized dance floor fills. The waitresses were prompt (we got three of them!). They wore outfits that did little to give the establishment that touch of class a bar needs to last longer than a few months.

'Burgundy Bangs' ordered a glass of the house wine; a white described as unremarkable, but passable.

Mr. Light informed us that there was no chef, but told us the menu had been devised by

George Brown College. George should sue.

The *Giant Nacho Platter* (\$2.75) was nothing more than commercial taco chips with a very bland sauce. The onion soup was black, oversalted, lukewarm, and obviously a commercial preparation.

The entree brought better fare. My tablemate, the "Zircon Girl", ordered the quiche (\$4.55). The filling was fluffy and well seasoned but sat soggy in a commercial crust. The spinach salad served with it added nothing.

I had the steak (\$8.95), the most expensive meal. It was topped with a puff pastry filled with mushrooms, and a side of fries. The steak was delicious; hot and made to order. The pastry and mushrooms, however, were served with a brown sauce that was much too heavy and disguised the taste of the beef.

So thick

We decided to try a *Bobby Jo's* 'munchy' called *Intelligent Stuffed Potatoes*. Stupid! This baked potato was enveloped in a yellow sauce so thick I could have hung wallpaper with it.

Dejuiced carrot

Finally, the desserts. Avoid, avoid. A cheesecake from Sara Lee. A carrot cake so dry you wonder if the carrots were dejuiced before they gave their lives for *Bobby*.

If you are looking for a place to drink and dance try *Bobby Jo's*. But at \$40 for two, including wine and tips, eat before you.



Rhinestone Productions presents *The Best Kept Secret*. (L-R) Alexander Van Ihinger, Kathy Smith and Marshall Golden form a new film trio with a social conscience.