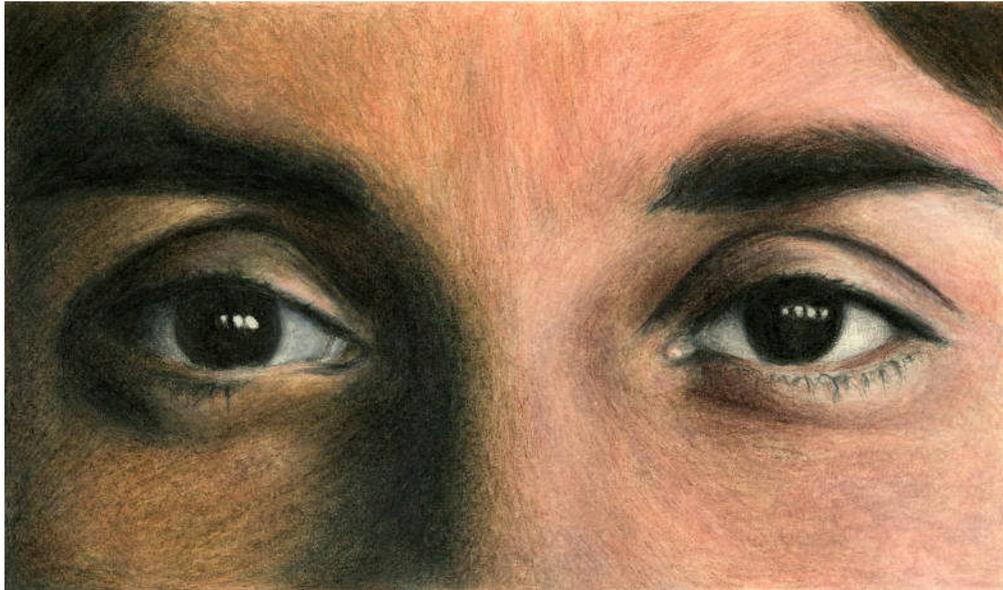


Unspeakable

A father's suicide is no ordinary death in the family.

By Oscar-nominated filmmaker Sally Heckel



Sold Out NYC Showing: Cinewomen on Screen
NYWIFT series (New York Women in Film & TV)
Magno Review, 2009

Official Selection – DOX BOX 09
Creative documentary film festival in Damascus, Syria

Grand Jury Award Winner:
The American Falls Award for Best Western New York Film
2008 Buffalo Niagara Film Festival

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**Non-Fiction Narrative 93 minutes Color
16mm original HD digital finish
USA English Release 2008**



Reviews

“This film is masterful. Using home movies from her childhood, poetry, portraits, re-enactments and stills, Sally Heckel presents her family – a family conflicted and traumatized by the intractable depression and suicide of her physician father. Although the central theme is a daughter’s quest to understand her father and come to terms with his self-inflicted death, it is much much more. “Unspeakable” is an intimate look at a family, the fractured communication, the longing for connection, the painful and paralyzing shroud of stigma and the persistent courage to move forward out of the darkness.”

Michael F Myers, MD, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry

SUNY Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY

Co-author (with Carla Fine) “Touched By Suicide: Hope and Healing After Loss”

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“Unspeakable is truly wonderful. The film captures the confluence of feelings that the suicide of a loved one leaves in its wake: confusion, sadness, anger, blame, guilt, fear, and the need to know.

When someone dies by suicide—especially a family member or close friend—we feel crazy, alone, isolated, even with, and sometimes especially with, those closest to us. Unspeakable communicates this without hitting us over the head with this frightening reality.”

Carla Fine, author “No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One”

Comments

“The film leads me into a deep reflection of my own life.”

Yeeshan Yang, Author

“Perfectly made film... every cut is in the right place... gripping from start to finish.”

Todd Boekelheide, Film Composer

“It makes the invisible visible.”

Sarah Elder, Filmmaker/Professor Media Studies, SUNY Buffalo

“I just finished watching your extraordinary film. I'm overwhelmed. Not only is it an amazingly generous portrait of you and your family that brought me to tears, it's also, aesthetically speaking, one of the most beautifully shot and edited documentaries I've ever seen.”

Tim Cusack, Actor/Theater Director

“[Unspeakable has] a power to reveal ourselves in its story, as if we were looking into a mirror under the harshest possible light. [This film] shows so much of ourselves that it is almost too much to bear, in the manner of George Eliot's 'roar that lies on the other side of silence.' It is hard to see so clearly and so far, and it requires great fortitude to bear what is there to see.”

John Perkins, Writer/Documentary Producer

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Film stills

To download stills go to <http://www.unspeakablethefilm.com/stills.html>



Eliza Schneider in *Unspeakable*



Darrell Lance in *Unspeakable*

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Capsule synopsis

A 20-year exploration of a father's suicide and the deeper truths revealed about the American family told in first-person narrative by filmmaker Sally Heckel using home movies, actors, drawings, photos, trees, anything to best tell the story. A viewer commented, "It makes the invisible visible."

Synopsis

On a bright spring morning in May, Dr. George Heckel climbed the stairs to the attic of his home in Rochester, New York, and shot himself. He had a thriving medical practice, a wife and three children, and a beautiful home. Why would a man who seemed to have it all take his life and leave his family devastated?

Twenty years later, his daughter, filmmaker Sally Heckel, 17 at the time of her father's death, started making a non-fiction film exploring her father's despondent state of mind. It soon grew from an expression of anger and accusation toward her father to an in-depth perusal of the suicide and the years surrounding it.

In a storyline that bridges past and present, Heckel weaves home movies of what appears to be an idyllic post-war American childhood with dramatic silent recreations of a home life that reveal a darker side of the American family. The film paints a picture of a man few people really knew, who had, in pursuit of a successful societal and professional position, gradually and inexorably alienated himself from his family, with profound consequences to himself and those around him.

Acting as the film's narrator, Heckel coaxes her family and friends out of their silence. Through their voice-over recollections and reflections, Heckel crafts a layered portrait of an idealized but ambivalent American patriarch, his family, and the tensions that simmered beneath the surface and beyond public view.

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Director's Statement

Making a film about my father's suicide certainly didn't make for good party conversation. But more times than I expected someone would say, "Oh, my mother ... " or "My best friend ... " We'd instantly share an understanding. In the 20 years that it took me to research, film and edit *Unspeakable*, what kept me going was the knowledge that I was giving voice to a common experience that was seldom talked about.

As I worked on the film, I realized that in its probing of the emotionally complex relationship between family members and how individuals in families identify with each other, I was tackling a more widespread issue that went beyond one man's suicide. I was delving into the American nuclear family of the 1950s, an archetype that we have come to see as the incontrovertible foundation of our modern society. I was showing in painful clarity the price all family members pay for maintaining an archetype.

The silent, serious father that I remembered - a kind of American patriarch - was a man who, in his poetry, photography and home movies, was as much an artist as a doctor, but who felt compelled, as many men of that time did, to be the head of a family and a respected member of the social elite. The sacrifice he made of his artistic self became a fundamental part of his relationship to his family - we were the trappings of a life that he both embraced and resisted. I believe the irreconcilable nature of these competing identities was a major contribution to his depression, feelings of uselessness, and eventual suicide. I also believe that same conflict between social conformity and the individual remains at the core of the traditional American family.

Unspeakable is elliptical in form, re-examining memories, gaining insight as it unfolds. Voices, sounds and silence become the music. My goal was to give viewers the time to experience their own reactions, thoughts, and personal connections as the film moves back and forth through time. I don't think I found a clear answer to my father's suicide. Rather, I found a way to better understand the questions that I was asking and the emotions that I had about his life and death.

Making *Unspeakable* was a difficult process for me. When I started the film, I got sick for four months. I was unearthing years of repressed feelings—anger, sorrow, guilt. But as I worked on it, the film became for me a process of release from the domination of the past. I hope the film engenders a similar process for others who also struggle with the burdens of family history, depression and even suicide. As one viewer told me, "Your film expressed emotions that we lack language for."

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Main Documentary Cast

George P. Heckel

The filmmaker's father was an obstetrician/gynecologist and amateur poet and photographer. Born in Buffalo, NY, he lived in Rochester, NY, from age 11 where he married his high school sweetheart, Bobbie Gage. Besides a clinical practice, he conducted research into pre-menstrual stress (PMS) for many years. He developed a pill, Pregnanliol, which was marketed in Japan as Diol.

Bobbie Heckel

The filmmaker's mother helped her husband, George, through medical school working as a social worker. Later she did the accounting for his medical practice. She and George had three children, Philip, Susan, and Sally. Bobbie was an avid reader and was especially fond of Shakespeare.

Philip Heckel

The filmmaker's older brother is Professor of Geoscience, specializing in sedimentary geology and particularly interpretive stratigraphy, at the University of Iowa.

Susan Heckel

The filmmaker's older sister studied art at Skidmore College and for a year in Florence, Italy. She paints or draws occasionally.

Bill Thawley

One of George Heckel's best friends, Bill was in the pharmaceutical industry. He and George confided in each other, sharing their emotional lives.

Teddy Wolfard

One of George Heckel's best friends, Teddy owned a fine arts gallery in Rochester, NY. He and George discussed art, music, Buddhism, and philosophy.

Clara Wolfard

Clara, Teddy's wife, was George Heckel's secretary the last two years of his life.

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Main Dramatic Sequences Cast

Darrell Lance – Father

Darrell Lance recently played a well-received Wemmick in *Great Expectations*, a production of Blackfriar's Theater in Rochester, NY. Darrell is active in Rochester's community and semi-professional theater as well as industrial films, commercials, and voice-over work. He is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Interpretation at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School where he taught for 28 years.

Barbara Lobb – Mother

Barbara Lobb "commands the stage," (Rochester City Newspaper Online Edition) in her recent role as Stevie in Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia*, a production of Shipping Dock Theater in Rochester, NY. She has performed in numerous productions of Rochester's theater community.

Eliza Schneider – Teenager

Eliza Schneider's solo show, *Freedom of Speech*, Award of Excellence winner at The New York International Fringe Festival, is "a 34 character documentary of her 317,000 mile journey throughout America in a converted ambulance, on a mission to define American culture." She has traveled the world collecting recordings of dialects for her CDs and award-winning multiple character solo shows. She has voiced characters for films and animation series including *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow*, and *South Park*. She has also starred in live-action TV such as the Emmy-Award winning series *Beakman's World*.

<http://www.elizaschneider.com/>

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0773791/>

Laura Otis – Child

Laura Otis was a student in the Fairport Elementary School when she performed in *Unspeakable*.

Vicki Casarett – Filmmaker

Vicki Casarett's recent portrayal of Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Frank Galati's stage adaptation of John Steinbeck's classic novel at the Blackfriars Theatre in Rochester, NY, was hailed as "a veritable tour de force" (Rochester Democrat & Chronicle). Her latest project is the stage role of Annie Wilkes in *Misery*, Simon Moore's stage adaptation of the Stephen King thriller, also at Blackfriars. She appears regularly in the many productions of Rochester's theater community.

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Filmmaker Bio

Sally Heckel – Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer, Editor

Sally Heckel is an independent filmmaker who directs, writes, edits, produces and often shoots her films.

Heckel's latest film, *Unspeakable*, is her first feature. Twenty years in the making, it's a non-fiction narrative exploring her father's suicide and the deeper truths revealed about the American family. It recently screened at DOX BOX 09 in Damascus, Syria, and won a Grand Jury Award - The American Falls Award for Best Western New York Film - at the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival. Heckel wrote, produced, directed, shot, and edited *Unspeakable*, creating a film form that unfolds her experience of her father's suicide in a way that makes her personal story a universal experience of family. She combines silent scenes with actors, self-portraits, home movies, evocative landscapes, photos, narration and voice-over interviews. Images and sound work as counterpoints to one another, creating an inner experience of memory and discovery.

One of Heckel's earlier films, *A Jury of Her Peers*, a drama, was nominated for an Oscar for best dramatic live-action short. Adapted from the 1917 short story by Susan Glaspell, it tells the story of a farm woman accused of murdering her husband in early 1900s Midwest America. Heckel adapted, produced, directed and edited the film. Other awards include: Blue Ribbon Award from the American Film Festival, ATOM Award from Australian Teachers of Media, and Best Dramatic Film from Santa Fe Film Festival. The film was selected for international film festivals including Telluride Film Festival, USA; London Film Festival, England; Melbourne, Sydney and Perth Film Festivals in Australia; and Tampere Film Festival, Finland. It had distribution in Europe, and has become a classic in the US where it enjoys active distribution to high schools, universities and law schools.

Heckel has also worked with sand animation. *The Bent Tree*, a poetic visualization of a Yiddish folk song, created with colored sand on glass, is distributed as a stand-alone piece. It has won several awards, including the Judge's Award at Sinking Creek Film Celebration, and was shown in Festivals including Filmex in Los Angeles and Ottawa International Animated Festival.

Heckel's earlier films, *It's Not a One-Person Thing*, a documentary about a far-reaching organization of grass-roots cooperatives in the South that grew out of the Civil Rights Movement, *Ordinary Days* and *Lou*, both narratives about life in New York City, also won awards including a Silver Hugo at the Chicago International Student Film Festival, the Judges' Award at Sinking Creek Film Celebration, and the Cine Golden Eagle.

Heckel is a recipient of production grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the

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American Film Institute, New York State Council on the Arts, and private foundations. She has served on film panels and taught directing workshops. Born and raised in Rochester, NY, Heckel received an MFA in Film from New York University Graduate Institute of Film/TV in 1974.

Crew Bios

Jeanne McDonnell – Production Designer for dramatic scenes

Jeanne McDonnell has worked in independent film for over 20 years. She has done Art Direction on such award winning productions as John Sayles' *Lianna*, Jan Oxenberg's *Thank you and Goodnight*, and Sally Heckel's Oscar-nominated *A Jury of Her Peers*. She also worked on Roberta Cantow's Emmy Award-winning *Clotheslines*. McDonnell has also written and produced the children's TV pilots *Riff's Place* and *Assignment Kids* for public television, which featured animations by her and puppets designed by master puppeteer, L. Stallman. She has recently completed a script for the anti-war musical comedy, *Time Twins*, and is putting the finishing touches on her first novel, *Pathways*.

Leane Clifton – Assistant Director

Leane Clifton has been working in documentary filmmaking since 1987 on such award-winning programs as *Porgy and Bess - An American Voice*, *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand*, and *A Huey P. Newton Story*. These films garnered an Emmy, the IDA Award for Best Documentary and a Peabody Award. She was Co-Producer on the PBS series, *ColorVision*, and is currently producing her own documentary, *Beisbol's Latin Rhythm*. Her extensive background in producing and archival research led to her ongoing position as Project Manager for the Paul Robeson Audio Visual Database Project.

Tracy Stopa Moran – Assistant Camera

Tracy Stopa Moran graduated from RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) film program and has worked as assistant camera, producer, and unit production manager on film productions in the Rochester area. She also owns and operates TSM pictures, a business specializing in event /portrait photography.

John Frontutto – Assistant Camera/Gaffer

A graduate of RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) film program, John Frontutto worked for 5 years in production at the local PBS station WXXI, and as cameraman for the Buffalo Bills for 10 years. He is now head of the Video Production Department for the Public Safety Training Facility at Monroe Community College, producing training videos for Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS.

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Tim Tuchrello – Second Electric/Grip

Tim Tuchrello works as a sound editor in Los Angeles, CA.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0875748/>

John Falzone

John Geoffrey Falzone has worked as a model and played principal and featured roles in commercials, film, and theater in the Rochester area.

Post-Production Bios

Bruce Kitzmeyer – Sound Designer and Editor

Bruce Kitzmeyer has worked in post production sound in New York for almost 30 years. His latest projects were *Music and Lyrics*, *The Good Shepherd*, and Rick Burns' documentary, *Andy Warhol*.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0457835/>

John Werner – Sound Designer and Editor

John Michael Werner, a Bucks County, PA, native, has been working in post production sound for film since 1994. Raised "shagging flies" (chasing baseballs) on the disappearing farmland of bucolic Bucks County, John finds himself in East Harlem endeavoring in creative pursuits. In this past year John has worked on the films *The Good Shepherd*, *The Savages*, and Rick Burns' Peabody Award winning documentary film, *Andy Warhol*, as well as video projects for the art night, *Church in DUMBO*. *Unspeakable* features some of his most creative sound work.

Josh Waletzky – Sound Editor of Interviews

Josh Waletzky is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and editor.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0907413/>

Jen Bradwell – Data Wrangler

Jen Bradwell is a San Francisco Bay Area-based documentary editor, highly versed in Final Cut Pro and Avid. Since graduating from the University of Southern California's film school, she has edited on several feature and television documentaries as well as corporate projects.

<http://jenbradwell.com/Home.html>

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Allan Holt – Color Correction

Allan Holt has worked as assistant editor as well as special effects artist on many films. He recently created an animated film, *Canvas*, which was shown at Cannes and Edinburgh International Film Festivals. He is currently working at Stan Winston Studios.
<http://allanholt.com/>

Heather Heckel – Eyes Drawing and Website

Heather Heckel is currently an illustration student at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, FL. Her work has won awards and been selected in juried shows.
<http://www.heatherheckel.com/>

Credit List

Produced, Written, Directed, Photographed, Edited
Sally Heckel

Archival Home Movies & Still Photographs
George P. Heckel

Production Design
Jeanne McDonnell

Assistant Director
Leane Clifton

Location Courtesy of
Joe de George

Actors in Order of Appearance

Child	Laura Otis
Teenager	Eliza Schneider
Filmmaker	Vicki Casarett
Mother	Barbara Lobb
Father	Darrell Lance
Voice of Child	Heather Heckel
Sister	Bethany Reynolds
Sister's Boyfriend	Tim Tuchrello
Teenager's Boyfriend	Chris Martin

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Dramatic Sequences Crew

Field Producer	Jeanne McDonnell
Assistant Camera	Tracy Stopa Moran
Assistant Camera/Gaffer	John Frontuto
Second Assistant Camera	Nicholas Iacona
	Bill Trainor
Second Electric/Grip	Tim Tuchrello
Assistants to the Production	John Falzone
	Peg Mayer
Catering	Martha Gioumousis
Antique Cars	Bill Biche
	Eric Marshall

Documentary Shoot

Avalanche Lake Field Producer	Christine McDonald
Assistant to Avalanche Lake Production	Tsienli Tan
Oxberry	Mimondo Productions
Drivers	Dave Hannie
	Paul Galen
	Michael Tercio

Interviewees	Bobbie Heckel
	Phil Heckel
	Sue Heckel
	Bill Thawley
	Clara Wolfard
	Teddy Wolfard
	Eleanor Freeman
	George Gage
	Roger Stolte

Interviewers of Filmmaker	Steve Brand
	James Khlevner
	Henry Sapoznik

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Post Production

Supervising Sound Editor **Bruce Kitzmeyer**
Sound Design **John Werner**
Interview Sound Editor **Josh Waletzky**
Mixing Studio **Sound One**
Re-Recording Mixer **Peter Waggner**
Foley Artist **Nancy Cabrera**
Foley Recordist **Ryan Collison**
Re-Recordist **Paul Coburn**

Data Wrangler **Jen Bradwell**
Color Correction **Allan Holt**

Eyes drawing and website **Heather Heckel**

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NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

and grants from
JEROME FOUNDATION
WOMEN'S FUND

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AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE



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Individual Donors

Mark Brody **Rachel Kranz**
Smokey Forester **Mike Mandall**
Eleanor Freeman **Christine McDonald**
Steve Gelmis **Henry Sapoznik**
Phil Heckel **Lisa Thomas**
Sue Heckel **Clara Wolfard**

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Special Thanks

Felix Andrew	Carol Lazio
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Smokey Forester	Sarah Plant
Jim Gardner	Zach Sklar
Fran Gragg	Lorin Wertheimer
Kris Hackel	Katahdin Foundation
Jan Huttner	Millenium
Rachel Kranz	WITASWAN
Jeanne Laberge	701 Sound

Dedicated to my family

**Sue, Phil, Daniel, Tamara, Heather
Bobbie Heckel & George P. Heckel**

c Sally Heckel 2006

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