

Her Name is Sabine (2008)

Sandrine Bonnaire



César-winning actress Sandrine Bonnaire, internationally known for her starring roles in Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) and Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* (1985), directs *Her Name is Sabine*, a heart wrenching and award-winning documentary on a deeply personal topic for Bonnaire: her younger sister Sabine and her lifelong struggle with autism. Now 38, Sabine lives in a specialized care facility in the Charente (central west) region of France along with four other patients. Bonnaire explains that at the age of 28, after the family realized that they could no longer provide the treatment that she needed, Sabine was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. There she remained misdiagnosed, heavily medicated, and at times straight-jacketed for 5 years, the time that it took for Bonnaire, with a tremendous amount of effort, to procure a better living situation for her sister.

Bonnaire and her editor, Svetlana Vaynblat, seamlessly interweave clips of present-day Sabine with footage of home videos and family photos. Images of a young, smiling and vibrant woman whose beauty rivals that of her movie-star sister contrast sharply with the present-day Sabine, 60-odd lbs heavier, whose once sharp gaze is now often clouded, as she walks somewhat sluggishly in front of the camera, hunched over and driveling. Although there is no actual footage of Sabine during her time in the hospital, the juxtaposition of before and after images leads one to the unsettling conclusion that Sabine's deteriorated mental and physical state is largely due to her treatment, or mistreatment in the psychiatric hospital.

In this film, Bonnaire addresses a situation too often mishandled by the much lauded French healthcare system: the need for better healthcare facilities and programs for those with autism and their families. A case study from 2002 reports that of the 75,000 people (19,000 of which are children) diagnosed with autism and in need of special care and education, only 10% could be placed in special programs. In France, waiting lists for specialized treatment centers can take up to 10 years (www.minorityrights.org).

Matthew Turner called *Her Name is Sabine* an "achingly personal and deeply moving portrait." (*ViewLondon*)

The film won the FIRPRESCI Award at the Cannes film festival in 2007, and was described as "the most beautiful film Cannes has given us this year ... it's cinema at its purest."

Her Name is Sabine: Saturday 11/1 – 4.30 pm; Tuesday 11/4 – 7 pm; Wednesday 11/5 – 9.30 pm

Written by Patricia Dimit