

IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL

A Film By Lawrence R. Hott and Diane Garey

Based on the book by Jay Neugeboren

54:15

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TRANSCRIPT

Robert Neugeboren: There are three guys waiting to get into the hospital and they said show us your wrist, your shoulder and your elbow. So the first one says, this is my shoulder, this is my wrist and this is my elbow. Oh, no, no good. You have to go to the back ward. The next one said, this is my wrist, this is my shoulder and this is my elbow. Sorry. The third one said this is my wrist, this is my elbow and this is my shoulder. Very good, they passed around the booze and cigarettes. How'd you know that, how'd you know that, the guy asked him. Simple, kidneys.

Jay Neugeboren: There was a time, this goes back, I think oh about five, six years ago, when Robert was doing very well, going out on passes. He seemed fine, very stable and everybody agreed, including the people at the hospital, that he shouldn't be in a locked ward anymore.

R: We're on a closed ward in South Beach Psychiatric Center. But it's also South Beach, South Beach State Hospital.

J: And I started making calls to try to get him out of a locked ward, and I got no response.

R: It's decent. It's clean. And they try to keep it clean. But it's too confined. It's a closed ward and I don't like a closed ward.

J: Finally I got to one doctor, and I said, Look, we get windows of opportunity with Robert, you know. Four, five, six, seven weeks when he's doing well and if we can move him then, then he can make some real gains.

R: That's better because I could get coffee. Meet new people. I can always make friends.

J: And I said, what can I do to help? And he says, talk to the governor. And he hangs up on me.

VO

I said, Okay, I'm a writer. I'm gonna talk to the Governor. I'm gonna write him a letter.

Letter: January 7, 1994

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I wrote a letter to Governor Cuomo, about my brothers situation and how it was not just a lost opportunity but criminal to keep him locked up when everybody agreed he shouldn't be locked up.

For several months now, according to all reports, he has been doing well. He is coherent, animated, funny, warm, and very eager to get off this locked ward.

R: Hi, Lester. He's my roommate. He's really Preston Sturges.

Larry Hott, film director: VO: How long have you been here?

R: For many years on and off.

Larry: Like 10 years or 20 years?

R: Yeah.

Larry: More maybe, how....give me an estimate.

R: I don't know. I don't know if I've been here since 1960 something or another.

J: Robert's been here, I think since on and off since about 1974.

Letter: Visitors to the ward are turned away, passes to get off the ward are given and taken away depending upon his levels of Irritability@ (but who wouldn't be Irritable if locked up 24 hours a day?)

J: The people I'm dealing with, Robert's doctors, aids at the hospitals have my brother. And in the past he's suffered abuse. They take punitive measures. I try never to rub them wrong. This time my patience was finally gone.

A couple of weeks later I get a call from the team leader of Roberts ward. And he said, "Did you write a letter to the Governor?" And I said, "Yeah." And he says, "well nothing in your letter is false." He said, "Well all hell is falling down on the ward and on the doctors because of this letter I wrote."

The Governor's office came down on the department of mental health, and they came down on

the hospital. And they finally started working to get him out of the locked ward, and to get him some good attention.

TITLE: DAY PASS, AUGUST, 1997

Robert: We're making a movie about going to lunch. My first day out with you Larry.

Larry: How long has it been since you've been out?

R: About a month or so.

Larry: Are you looking forward to this kind of food?

R: Yes I am.

Larry: Do you get to eat good food at the South Beach?

R: Not really. They give me low cholesterol and chopped food, because I have no teeth.

R: There's Murray smiling.

J: No.

R: I mean that's Caroline?

J: Yup.

R: Who's the other girl?

J: That's a friend of Caroline, Rebecca. That's Ronnie.

R: That's Ronnie. And who's the other fella?

J: That's Caroline's husband, Joe.

R: Really?

J: Yeah.

R: I didn't expect him to look like that.

R: I once wrote a poem, and it was called Lesbina. Lesbina. Once upon a time, I met Lesbina. She had eyes like deep dark holes burning in the deepness of the darkness of various midnight or anywhere past 11:32 which is out-goes-the-light time. Time she had which made her nice and bad, like sugar and spice. That's all I can remember.

Larry: Are you drawing a self-portrait?

R: Yeah

J: I think the odds on his being able to stay out on a sustained basis are very good. He's very sociable; he loves to talk with people.

R: Are we on tape?

Larry: Yeah.

R: Hi, hi, hi. Ciao,ciao.

J: VO He's basically been in city hospitals, state hospitals, emergency wards, half-way houses, for 37 years now. The last 6 years he's been in this one hospital on isolation most of the time, day after day after day.

Clerk: Hi.

R: Hi. You got shoes?

C: Do we have shoes?

R: Yeah.

J: VO How would any of us survive that if we had to live that way, for even a week or two, and somehow Robert does survive.

R: You got gray or black?

C: What are you looking for, gray?

R: Yeah.

C: It's in black.

Robert: Black is good.

J: VO He gets out again. He does reasonably well. And he wants the kind of stuff any of us would want, the ordinary stuff of life. He'd like his cigarettes, he'd like his cigars, he'd like a new pair of shoes.

R: Let me try them on, OK?

J: VO Roberts not passive. He's very active, he's very involved, he's not withdrawn, he doesn't hide his feelings, he's out there. Through the years this has gotten him into lots of trouble on some of the wards he's been on in state hospitals where custodial needs often govern everything.

J: This is a trunk my mother sent north from New York when she and my father moved to Florida. That would've been 1973, and she sent it all here against the day when she hoped he would be able to live outside a hospital and live on his own, have his own place, but its been here for twenty-seven years.

J: This used to sit on top of our bookcase.

J: Underwear.

J: Actually, I remember when he did this. We sat around one day, and uh...

J: Don't remember that this was here. This is Roberts tefillin, which our father gave to him when he was bar mitzvahed when he was thirteen years old.

Larry: What's that?

R: This? My parents wedding. My mother had this on her vanity table with her in-laws, my fathers mother and father. They almost look alike. When I look at this picture, I used to cry. I said, Mama, why didn't you invite us to the wedding? She said because you wasn't born yet, you weren't with us yet, she said.

J: VO The world into which Robert and I were born before and during the second world war seems whole to me, at least in memory; what was in place then stayed in place. People didn't

move around as much. When, for example, there were senile members of a family, or troubled or eccentric members of a family they weren't put away most of the time. You tended to live out your life and grow old with your family. What was in place when we were little children stayed in place for most of our growing up.

R: Mr. Schaffer, the woman in charge; Dr. Weinberger, my friend; Eddie Grier; that's me.

Larry: Robert has been a delightful, popular and gifted boy and young man. Talented in dancing, singing and acting, invariably winning the lead in school and camp plays. He had a love and talent for many things: tennis, writing, art, chess. A person who showed no signs, until his first breakdown, that such a breakdown was at all likely, much less inevitable.

R: He wrote that in his book?

Larry: Yes.

R: Its good news to me. What's this nervous breakdown having to be inevitable? I was doing too much at once?

J: VO In many ways we were a typical lower-middle-class Jewish family from Brooklyn. There were just two children, me and Robert.

J: VO I started out wanting to be a baseball player. By the end of my second year in college I decided I wanted to be a writer.

J: VO Robert was a very gifted actor, singer, dancer as a child, all through childhood and his teenage years. He got the lead in school plays, he won a state scholarship to college.

R: Here's a good one of me, with a pussycat. I look different here. I really look different there, don't I? That's our pussycat Max....my father taught him how to box.

J: VO My father was a businessman, my mother was a registered nurse and she also ran campaigns for various charities. My mother loved to have a good time. My mother loved to have people over the house. I remember Saturday night she would have parties, you know, women would play canasta, mah-jong. Men would play pinochle. She had a gorgeous smile; she was very animated. She loved to tell jokes. She had a great capacity for happiness. But also a capacity for misery.

R: My mother always wanted to get a divorce, I don't know why. She never did get one.

J: VO My mother's relationship with my father was pretty awful. There was a certain affection between them all through the years, but my father never really earned a living and my mother had

to go back to work

R: She'd be a nurse at night, double duty, and then during the day she was a secretary

J: VO He wanted to be what was called a good provider. His wife should be able to stay home and raise the children. But he failed at every business he tried.

J: He felt terrible that he was never able to support the family.

R: you never liked him in the first place.

J: I never did? I liked dad.

R: All right.

J: I liked dad. I wished he'd been able to talk to me more. I think he felt so embarrassed and humiliated that he couldn't provide for the family that it made him more and more withdrawn. And very tense.

VO

Our family was very intense. Lots of anger, lots of loud voices. Lots of tumult. But I not sure that we weren't much like lots of other families. It doesn't explain what happened to Robert.

Larry: Tell me about your first break down.

R: NO! I was in Teaneck with my brother and we were traveling back and forth and he was yelling at me like this so I opened the door.

J: VO Robert's first breakdown occurred shortly before his nineteenth birthday. I was driving on the highway with Robert when he seemed very disturbed I said something to him that got him upset and he threw open the car door and threatened to jump out.

R: I couldn't help myself, I couldn't help myself. And she said I was sick, Miss Matthews said I was sick.

J: VO When I got Robert back to my parent's house in Queens, Robert came in and attacked me. He tried to choke me.

Larry: Do you think it was inevitable?

R: Yes.

Larry: Tell me why.

R: Leave me alone, will you please? Because everything is preordained, everything is preordained.

J: VO He tried to strangle our father that night while he was sleeping. He tried to make love to our mother. My parents took him to a psychologist, who said he didn't see any problems. Robert, among other things, pissed in the psychologist's office. Then they took Robert away in a strait jacket to Elmhurst hospital.

Through the years Robert has been diagnosed with everything from paranoid schizophrenia, regular schizophrenia, schizo-effective, bi-polar. My own sense is that through the years often the diagnosis has depended upon the medication. When Lithium was working he was manic depressive. When it stopped working and Thorazine worked then he became schizophrenic. And back and forth. Also certainly, when Robert was first hospitalized in the 60's, psychotic was pretty much a synonym for schizophrenic. Most people who were hospitalized were called schizophrenic. That's a very vague term, a catch-all term.

PROJECT RENEWAL NEW YORK CITY

J: VO In 1997, I published a book, IMAGINING ROBERT. Because of this book, people started writing to me and calling me and saying they thought they could do a better job with Robert. So, Robert moved from South Beach to Bronx State. At first, they said they didn't think he'd ever be able to live outside of a hospital, but six, seven months ago, they said they thought he was going to be able to get out.

R: Let's get rid of this family fight we have all the time.

J: VO We started looking into some options, one of which was Project Renewal, which is a highly structured residence in NYC, and Robert moved in there on September first, 1999.

R: We've gotta go upstairs, okay?

J: You wanna go just with Larry to your room?

R: Yeah. You have time with Jim, OK?

J: OK, I'll just relax here.

R: Is that okay?

J: That's fine. Yeah, sure.

R: The English or the British? Do we have the English or the British, Larry?

Larry: What? On the Camera?

R: Yes.

Larry : This is the English.

R: Oh. Watch out, everything's on the right hand side now.
How's your English? Do you wanna play tennis? You wanna play tennis?

L: In the elevator?

R: Ping-pong! Come on, here we are.

Larry: Ok, go ahead.

R: You know, I do this all the time. Let's see if Jay's calling me. Oh, I don't have my earring on.
How can they call me? Come on, he's my roommate.

L: How long have you been here?

R: A month, almost. August... I don't know...it's OK. Too many people running and running and racing and smoking and coughing. No resting, watch my eyes now.

R: What color's my hair? Gray or blond?

Larry: I think it's a little gray.

J: So, should we go get some lunch?

R: Where we goin'?

J: Where would you like to go?

R: Chinese, right?

J: Want Chinese?

Larry: Sure. Anything's fine.

R: I can't afford a tip, Jay.

J: Don't worry about it.

R: Did he give you the card?

J: Which card?

R: The Dime card.

J: No. But I've got money for us.

R: Wait a minute. You got money too?

Larry: Yeah, I've got plenty.

R: I've got \$10 on me.

Larry: Well, I'm gonna take you out to lunch.

R: Thank you very much. You're not going to ask me how I like my coffee, are you?

Larry: Why not?

R: Because they don't serve coffee in most Chinese restaurants.

R: You got wonton soup, huh?

R: Let me taste it OK? Give me your spoon. You're finished with the spoon, aren't you?

R: Don't reach over the table. Stop reaching over the table, will you please!

J: Robert, try to calm down.

R: I will, I shall, but don't keep doing things. I asked you what you want, you said nothing.

J: Robert if you keep shouting we're going to leave.

R: So leave already.

R: I thought you wanted some?

J: I'm fine.

R: Sure you're fine. You're a very fine young man. I really mean it.

J: VO Being with Robert on a day like this is no fun. He doesn't relate to me other than in a whole bunch of old, very, to me, very familiar ways. Vague references to things in the past that he thinks will hurt me--my ex wives-- or stuff from our childhood. I don't want to be his therapist either. I want to be his brother.

R: You better wait outside, Jay.

J: OK.

R: I'm getting really angry with you.

L: What are you angry about? Do you know?

R: Yes.

J: What?

R: When you come, I have to obey everything you wanted me to do. You're my older brother, Jay.

R: No, I don't!

J: Whew. Rough day.

Larry: Is he always like this?

J: No, this is, he's a having a hard time. He's having a very hard time and so am I. It's hard to be with him when he's like this. And partly, my sense is that he knows that it's hard and it just, he doesn't find anyway out. I don't, there's not much I can do except get through the time we're together and hope, you know, that it goes passably well. But there's, I don't know. It's hard.

R: All right, Jay. Get out of his focus.

J: What?

R: Jay, he's trying to focus on me, get out of the picture.

J: I'm not in the picture.

R: Not much you're not. You're in the picture!

J: I thought you were angry with me?

R: I'm not angry with you, sometimes I am. Don't block the exit, OK?

R&J: Happy trails to you, until we meet again.

J: Come on, let's get out of here.

VO

J: I'm relieved that the visit's over. It was really hard, it was hard for both of us I think.

J: What's going through my mind is I think he's gonna make it as hard as today was. I think the staff here is gonna be, is very good with him. And I think he'd rather be out than in.

Larry: Tell me how many therapists and doctors have you had.

R: A lot.

L: Tell me about them.

R: I cannot tell you about it. Every time I go to a therapist they get called away.

J; VO

He's had hundreds of different social workers, doctors. They get transferred, in the state systems often the turnover rate is very very high. For someone who already has a pretty fragile purchase on the world, not to be able to count on your caregivers makes life even more fragile.

Larry: What medicine are you on?

R: Who knows. Clozerol and Sodium Benzoate...and liquid, the elixer...I'm on a lot of medicine.

Larry: How many institutions and places?

R: I don't know.

L: Maybe Jay knows.

R: I was at Gracie Square three times. I was in Creedmoor three times. That's about it.

J: And Hillside was the first place where Robert stayed long term. And this was the first of many. After this you were at Creedmoor on and off for four and a half years. You were at Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center.

R: That's true. That's true.

J: You were at South Beach for many years. Gracie Square. Bronx Psychiatric Center.

R: Two years I was in the Bronx.

J: Two years in the Bronx and a lot of in between a lot of SROs.

R: Yeah.

L: Jay and I had talked about perhaps going to Hillside or Creedmoor and a couple of those places.

R: Hillside would be OK. I won't go to Creedmoor.

L: What is it about the other places that would make it hard to go back to?

R: I might end up in the hospital again.

L: Because of your reaction?

R: Yeah. I don't want to go back to a hospital, Larry.

Larry: Just even to look at them?

R: Yeah. Maybe Hillside, but I don't know that we could get permission with the camera.

HILLSIDE HOSPITAL, QUEENS, NEW YORK

Larry: This man over here was a patient here about thirty years ago.

Woman: Can't film on these grounds, sir.

Larry: Okay, well we'll just go back outside then.

R: All my memories are good from Hillside. I wasn't tortured, I got too much Thorazine though

and I couldn't go out in the sun. I lost all my teeth because of butter rum lifesavers and _____.

J: Robert did very well while he was here. It was near my parents' home. We could visit him every week. He got a lot of therapy of different kinds. Talk therapy, family therapy. You were in a special program, remember for where you saw a therapist a few times a week. And Robert got well enough to get out and went back to college, remember?

R: Yup.

J: This folder was underneath this drawer, and I said, ahhh, here's some of Robert's poems. And I opened it and instead of poems, I read the first page it said "From the Diary of a Nineteen Year Old Mental Patient Named Robert Gary Neugeborn. Post box 1038, Glen Oaks, NY."

R: I shall go through the day trying to remember what has happened and how I happened this Wednesday in April.

R: I woke at eight after dreaming of a circus. I changed my linens. They have a thing called linen exchange where you bring last weeks dreamed in and creamed in sheets in exchange for nice soft white new sheets, pillowcases, and towels.

VO

J: I wish everybody could read this so that they could understand what it was like to be a mental patient, to be hospitalized for a long period of time in the sixties what the treatments were like.

R: I had an appointment with Dr. Steiner the psychologist. It started at 12:45, and ended after four. He gave me a whole battery of tests, to start reproducing some simple geometric shapes. Then he made me draw them from memory. I did pretty well. Then he asked me to draw a man and a woman, then Rorschach tests. I keep insisting that they were all these ink blots; it was a crime to make them anything else.

Larry: Did writing a diary help?

R: Oh yeah, I could remember things from reading it, even now. I can see them in my head, these things we're talking about. I didn't show my diary to too many people, because it's private. I stopped remembering my dreams because Leeann told me, you don't have to remember all you dreams, Robert, this is Baltic Street. I'm sorry.

J: VO

I wish that people could know my brother in his own words and see how full of life and tenderness and frustration and love he was.

Larry: Is it hard for you to talk about this?

R: Yes it is. Please.

Letter to Jay:

I either sleep or read and also take my lithium like a good boy, dot dot dot.

Please write, type, and send pictures as every day I went to the mail like some prisoner of war, POW, if you show your face at a family wedding and they ask, you know Jay, didn't you have a brother, and there was something wrong with him. Tell them I smoke cigars, and that I really do love them, and that with my next face-lift I'll look even better than ever.

CREEDMOOR PSYCHIATRIC CENTER, QUEENS, NEW YORK

R: I haven't been back to Creedmoor in ten, twenty, thirty years now. It's not the same as it used to be. There's nobody here. There used to be lots of people here.

J: This is Creedmoor State Hospital. Robert was here in the 60s for, and maybe the early 70s, for a total of four and a half years in three different hospitalizations. It was, in my memory, the most horrible place Robert was in.

R: I remember before they used to put me in straitjackets here.

J: Robert was put in straitjackets, he was beaten up here. And the fear, of course, was that when he came back for the third time that he was never going to get out.

R: It's a birdy house, it was a birdy house.

J: Yeah, the worst thing you could say to somebody, parents would say it to their kids: If you don't behave yourself, I'll send you to Creedmoor. You belong in Creedmoor.

R: Every time I got sick my uncle Paul, may he rest in peace Jay.

J: No, he's alive.

R: He is alive?

J: Yeah.

R: Ohhh...I thought he's the one who passed away.

J: No, Evelyn did.

R: Oh my god, my mother's kid sister. I've been thinking it was Uncle Paul. I still say Yizkor

for him.

J: It's not a bad idea.

R: We didn't like him too much.

J: But I remember coming here, and you would wait outside with hundreds of other families. And all the families would have shopping bags full of food and clothing. And they would all be waiting, and they would all just look so sad. I think people who haven't been through this don't know the toll it takes on families.

J: I don't have many happy memories of visiting you here, Robert. I was happy when you got out.

R: Yeah. I don't remember you visiting me here. Because all the time I was just waiting for dad to bring me tobacco and good news from the home front.

J: VO

In the early 1970s, when Robert was a patient at Creedmoor, I was living in Massachusetts, teaching at the University, publishing novels and stories and raising my three children. My parents decided to retire and move to Florida. They moved there in 1973. Three years after that -- in 1976, my father died-- without ever having seen Robert again.

R: I felt very disappointed when I couldn't visit them.

When my father passed away. I was in mourning for a long time. I wasn't myself, believe me.

I can't go to funerals too much.

J: VO

In 1992, when my mother developed Alzheimer's, I had to put her in a nursing home. Between 1973 and 1992, she saw Robert twice.

R: You ready?

Larry: Yeah.

R: Help me Jay, okay.

J: Okay. Mother, mother, mother dear.

R: Wait a minute.

Mother, mother, mother, dear,
Why, when you are always near,
Do I feel so absolutely unfree?
Mother, mother, mother, dear,
Why, when you are always near,
Do I feel so absolutely un-me?

Say it to copyright.

J: Why oh why can't you see?

R: I did not write that, Jay.

J: No?

R: Mother can see, all right, believe me, Jay.

J: But I'm going Saturday to visit mother in Florida.

J: I spoke with the people down there who say she's, you know, her health is good.

R: I wonder why.

J: I wonder why too sometimes.

J: She had her 88th birthday two weeks ago.

R: Good for her.

Larry: Is there anything you want to say to your mother, you want us to say to her?

R: No, thank you.

WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

L: Jay, why don't you take the chair and sit down so you're facing me and your mother at the same time. Get in as close as you can, and turn towards me a little bit.

J: How's this?

J: Remember your other son...Robert? When I say Robert, you remember Robert and me growing up together, I saw Robert last week.

J: And he's in a very good place in NYC and we live six blocks away from each other. Isn't that amazing?

R: Her other son...

R: Robert got out of the hospital Mama. I don't go for that shit. He wanted me back in the hospital.

J: When Robert was a patient at Creedmoor we were in some, involved in something called multifamily group therapy.

R: Each person, each patient has family members arrive, and we talk about things together, problems, family therapy like group therapy.

J: There would be usually three families, an intern, a resident, and a guard.

R: I don't remember a guard.

J: Yeah there was always a guard in the room.

J: The theory behind it was that families, by seeing how other families reacted, could understand themselves better.

R: You could see how each family was sick, and some families were sicker than the other. They all had bad children and good children, like Sophia would say. Her bad, her good son was Billy; her bad son was Marty.

J: In one session, suddenly my mother said something about nobody loving her, or Robert not loving her, why does he say and do these things or something. And Robert got up with this kind of grin on his face, and walked across the room, bent over to kiss her. And I remember my mother smiling, see, and he bent over and he backed off, and my mother looked in horror and said, he bit me and she started bleeding.

R: I bit her nose.

J: You bit her nose?

R: Yeah.

J: You bit her nose and she was bleeding and my mother was a very histrionic woman and at that point became totally calm, and I remember she turned to the young resident and said...

J: Now, doctor, could you explain to me why does my son do these things?

J: The sessions were wild. After a while I finally, I felt they were counterproductive. I felt that they were.

R: Repetitive. Déjà vu.

J: They were really continuing the kind of stuff that went on in our home.

J: Remember Robert? Sure you do, yeah.

And my mother was always going to the next doctor who was promising a cure. She would say, the one she came with was Dr. Kahn who said, she said, he said to me, Mrs. Neugeborn, throw away your Freud, I'm going to cure Robert. And this was with something called Orthomolecular therapy, which is mega-doses of vitamins to counteract the supposed toxins in Roberts system.

J: When Robert would not be quote cured, then my mother would go on long tantrums, weeping, saying, "What did I do wrong?@. My father and I would just have to spend hours trying to calm her down.

R: It doesn't look like her, Jay.

J: It doesn't, huh.

R: Not that I remember.

J: In 1970, I remember, I came home for a weekend. Robert was in Creedmoor Hospital at the time, and my mother had been to Florida, had seen Century Village and had said she was moving there. And, I remember my father being very, very upset. It may have been that time and maybe another time, I came in, I remember he was actually down on the floor on his knees, he was saying, "Annie, I beg of you. One doesn't abandon a child. He's our son, he's our son and he's sick." My mother said, "I can't take it anymore." She looked over at me and she said (crying), she said, "Jay, you be in charge now. Let the state take over, I can't do it anymore. And I remember she said, ANobody knows what it's like to have a son, to have a child with mental illness. It's worse than death." And she really, she just couldn't take it. And in some ways, who

knows, I mean certainly, when she and...

R: I'm crying.

J: Yeah, me too. You can take my hand if you want.

R: It's OK.

R: I didn't like seeing my mother stretched out like that, squirming, and kept saying Robert's out of the hospital now He wanted me in the hospital, my Uncle Paul too I bet. I can't take him anymore! What will this world do with him? He's an insane young man!

J: A lot of parents have said to me, "I wish I'd had your mother's courage. I wish I could have left my kid because it's been awful.@.

J: The last time my mother saw Robert was probably (whew) 15 years ago. She came up north for my cousin's, my cousin's bat mitzvah. Robert came also, and we were all gathered in a restaurant that night, my mother's there and she turns and she reaches across the table to this man and says, "Oh, hello, I'm Ann Nuggeborn, who are you?" Robert says, I'm Robert Gary, your son, and he shakes her hand, and she hadn't recognized him. And that was the last time she saw him that I can remember.

R: My mother, she was a nurse. 1935, Anne E. Neugeboren. Camber.....what's that say? Something studio.

J: VO

I must say, she did, until the Alzheimer's came, she would thank me all the time for taking care of Robert.

PROJECT RENEWAL, NEW YORK
FIVE MONTHS AFTER ROBERT MOVES IN

R: (?)....let me have some money...

J: VO

He was doing really well until about a week ago...

R: How many bank accounts do you have for me?

J: We'll talk about it; this isn't the....

VO

He's hit some rough seas now.

R: Then ring the bell, go downstairs. Ring the bell, go downstairs; do you want to stay in a hallway all your life? Come on, let's get out of here.

J: VO

I hadn't seen him like this for, at least six, seven months. He hadn't been this bad.

R: Larry, can I have my room-mate sit with us? My room-mate Phillip.

Voice: Its going to be kinda crowded, Robert. I'm just worried about the amount of space.

VO

He's definitely on edge. He's having a real hard time listening to people, hearing things out.

Marianne Emanuel: With one of the case aids, Robert wanted a cigarette she gave him a cigarette. (he's here now I dont want to.)

R: She did not give me the cigarette.

M: And then...

R: ...story...story (unclear)

M: And then, um, he went back a few minutes later and asked for a cigarette, and then he hit her when she didn't give it to him.

J: Robert would you let me finish the sentence?

R: No.

J: Then we can't...

R: Talk then.

J: If they're trying to work with you so that you can arrive at a....

R: I have no money here! I have no money here! They can't give me money if I have no money here!

J: Robert, you keep interrupting me, and if...

R: I'm sorry.

J: It's hard to have a conversation, and I'd like to.

R: What's your problem, boss?

Dr. Ralph Aquila: One thing that we try to avoid is the knee-jerk of calling 911, someone getting hospitalized and then getting more agitated and getting into that spiral.

J: But I don't want you to interfere with the work you are doing with the people here. And if...

R: I'm not working for them, they're working for me, Jay.

J: No, the work you're doing *with* them.

Dr. Aquila: We brought him downstairs into what's called a safe haven. He was separated from the situation for a couple of weeks, and here we are trying to start over.

Dr: So, what we would like to do is to focus on what do we need to do to move forward...

J: VO

I think the staff is very alert to his changes.

Dr:: ... to go to have a life. Let's talk about getting a life.

J: VO

I think they're being firm where they need to be firm. I think they're doing a good job.

Dr: What are we trying to do?

R: Behave myself, no more striking out.

VO

J: If he was in some other places he would've been taken to an emergency ward, he would've been put on isolation, and then in some of the hospitals he'd been in, he would've been punished.

R: I want to study Braille. I'm blind, he's blind.

Dr. Aquila: VO He certainly not responding as well as one would hope. You're picking up some, what we define as psychotic symptoms: Tangential thinking, circumstantial thinking, so clearly the meds haven't worked as well as one would hope, but medication is not the only answer.

J: VO

It takes a lot of people to enable him to have a life of his own, and a decent life where he's not locked up. He needs a case manager, a psychiatrist, a nurse, other aides who work with him. It's a big job.

Jim Mutton, director Project Renewal: The basic thing is having a respect and appreciation for one another in the house.

R: (mumbling)I have appreciation....

Jim Mutton: Well, but recently you've been lacking, especially with the female staff members and residents.

R: That's because they're not doing their job.

Dr: So, I'm not sure where were going here.

R: Were not going anywhere because this is me.

Dr: Okay, well I disagree with that because I know that you can do a lot better. I see you do a lot better.

R: I'm trying to, I'm trying to.

Dr: And I know you can do a lot better.

R: Thank you very much.

Dr: So, you know, today I guess is not the best of days.

R: It's a miserable day for me.

Dr: Seems that way, yeah.

Marianne: What time did you go to fountain house?

R: Leave me alone will you please, I went there before 9:00, and then I had to come back for my medicine. I'm going this afternoon, too. I'm very punctual, I always go to class and go to school. What's your problem.

Marianne: Well, I didn't think I had any today.

R: Well then why did you tell me I had to go to fountain house for?

Marianne: Curiosity, question.

R: Oh. That's a random question.

Marianne: I just want to...no it's...

R: Why don't you take census in towns? Why don't you work for the census bureau?
...(mumbled)

Marianne: I don't know if I want to be a part of this.

R: So then leave, so walk out.

MANY PEOPLE TALKING IN MULTIPLE CONVERSATIONS

Dr: Tomorrow you're going for that test and I want to see what your coronary artery status is. Period. End of story. Is that clear?

R: I'm having a heart attack right now.

Dr: You're not having any heart attack, but we're getting it checked out to make sure of what we need to go next.

Dr: He's not to walk out of there, I'm gonna let them know. And no matter what happens have them...

R:...stop telling me I'm a criminal now, OK dad? This is too much.

Dr: This is not...you're not going down a good road with me right now, OK? I'm just telling you right now, tomorrow this test is gonna happen.

R: All right...

Dr: If the doctor, whatever they say, if they say there's a reason....there's my beeper number for you...OK?

Marianne: Here's the test, and here's where he's going, 3B, room 30.

J: OK, and does it have the time?

Larry: I just wanted to get your sense of how that meeting just went.

R: Me?

L: Yeah.

R: Same as usual. This is a ...I just had to calm down a little. I used to have low blood pressure now I have high blood pressure. Im a little wacky, that's all.

L: Say come in again.

R: Come in again. This is his space, this is my space. Look what a mess I am.

VO

J: I was optimistic when he moved in here now more than five months ago, actually five months today, and I'm still optimistic. I think he has sustained himself with some ups and downs on the outside of a hospital now for five months. He's not locked up, he can come and go.

R: You need a hat, Jay.

J: Nope, I have one, actually.

Dr. Aquila: VO

No one out there has the technology to identify who's going to be successful and who's not going to be successful. Our experience has shown that given the right kind of treatment, given the right kind of rehabilitation, given the right kind of support;people who were deemed not able to survive in a community have become successful. Obviously it's not everyone, but many, many people have turned their lives around. And furthermore, if it's not this time, it could be the next time.

R: Take a look, it's not a Bible.

J: No, what is it?

R: Take the Rubber band off.

L: So, are you staying here now, or are you going out.

R: I'm going out, my other coat is downstairs.

R: (mumbles)

J: Next time, we'll talk.

R: Goodbye, call me soon, Jay.

J: Yeah, I will.

R: You know I love you.

J: I love you too, Robert.

R: Take your (?) home....good luck, you know.

DAY TRIP TO BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
ONE MONTH LATER

R:(singing) It's a wonderful day today.

R: Id like to say I'm happy to be home again.

J: Robert, you're great.

R: I look like Groucho Marx!

J: It's, wow, it's exciting. Should we go?

R: Should we go _____, Jay?

J: Yeah, let's go down to Rogers. You okay, you need to lean on me a little bit?.

R: No, I'm all right.

J: VO

Going back to Brooklyn reminds me that just because this condition we call mental illness has afflicted Robert for all these years, doesn't mean that we can't, as brothers, as family members, do things together and have good times together.

R: This was ours, in the back.

J: Yep.

R: On the left.

J: On the left, yep.

R: Remember my tricycle?

J: Yep.

R: It was your tricycle, wasn't it?

J: First, then it was yours.

R: Yeah, then it was the Smith's. They just took it away one night.

(Robert singing)

R: I sound like an old fart!

J: We are now right in front of Erasmus Hall High School, where I went for four years, Robert went for his first three years.

J: He was an erratic student sometimes. I mean, sometimes, you know, he'd get very low grades, and then get very high grades, you know, on the Regents. He didn't like to study especially. But...there was nothing in my, when I look back, there was nothing in his early life, certainly until after high school, that indicated that he would have the life he's wound up having. I mean, looking back, maybe you can find things, but most people who knew him were astonished later to find out that he had broken down and had not recovered in any full way.

J: There he goes again.

Larry: Robert, how often do you find something in the phone booth?

R: Occasionally. A quarter or fifty cents or seventy-five cents.

Larry: Is it something that you have to do?

R: Its not an obsession, but I like to do it. I look forward to it.

J: It's a hobby.

R: Yeah.

J: Every body should have a hobby.

J: This is a camera that Robert bought. I remember him bringing it to me and showing it to me when he was a student at City College, CCNY, and when he decided he wanted to be a filmmaker he took a bunch of film courses; gorgeous old camera that actually still works.

R: This is my movie

Larry: This is your movie.

R: No sound, right?

Larry: No.

R: Bell and Howell?

Larry: Yeah, this is your Bell and Howell 8mm camera.

R: 16mm.

Larry: Was it?

R: That's the Earth, huh? How did you get this tape, did Jay give it to you?

Larry: We found it in the trunk.

R: The trunk?

Larry: The trunk that your mother set aside all those things.

R: Oh, yeah.

Larry: Jay found the trunk and then found some film.

PROJECT RENEWAL
EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER ROBERT MOVES IN

R: Trees, that's what I like the most. To see trees in the sky. Each little leaf, you know? Some movement, huh? You like it?

Larry: I like it alot.

R: You ever seen it before?

Larry: I've seen it before, and I wanted to see what you thought of it.

R: I think it's stupendous. Little lights are moving, no yellow lights though. What's it say, can you read it? That's beautiful, no?

Larry: Yes, beautiful.

R: Like Fantasia, no?

Larry: Without the music.

R: Yeah. You could always run music through it, couldn't you?

Larry: Un, huh.

R: The photograph. Say something, say something

Jim Mutton: Well, I thought you were going to ask me questions.

R: Do you enjoy working here?

Jim: Yes I do, I love working here, especially with folks like you around.

R: If you weren't getting money, would you still be around here, would you be working here?

Jim: Wow, that's a good question. Well, I've worked in mental health for eleven years, and I started as a volunteer when I was a teenager.

Dr. Aquila: Pretty scary, isn't it? Enough to give you nightmares overnight.

R: Do I annoy you or harrass you?

Dr: You try see, but you have to get through all the crap and get to the real Robert, and then you understand that there's a lot of talent and a lot of potential.

R: Yeah. What do you have, a dimple there, or...

Dr: Yeah, like Kirk Douglas, you know how it is.

R: Is it true you've been my case worker for two years already.

Rhonda Kudel, caseworker: I am your case worker.

R: And we still haven't gone out to lunch.

Rhonda: No, we have not gone out to lunch yet.

R: Is it true you just bought me a nice pair of sandals?

Rhonda: Yes, that's true. I just bought you a nice pair of sandals.

R: Is it true that you love me?

Rhonda: It is true, see. I just bought Robert these sandals, and he says I never give him anything. I keep his cologne on my desk. I think this is a way we stay connected to each other.

R: We both drink seltzer.

Rhonda: We both drink seltzer water. And Robert can come in during the day and give himself a

splash, and that allows him to be connected to me and know his things are safe. And right, I give him candy. And that also gives me an opportunity to know that I'm gonna see Robert and find out what's going on at Fountain House, what's going on with his room. Current issues now are a little different; when we first started working together it was more about getting him into program, it was about trying to get him to adjust to living in the community after being institutionalized, a lot of that kind of work. Now, we're sort of working more on ADL skills a little bit, right?

L: What's ADL?

R: Americans for Democratic Liberation.

Rhonda: ADL: Activities of daily living; taking care of himself, him being able to shower, shave, groom himself, personal hygiene. Right? We're working on those nails a little bit.

L: Show me your nails.

Rhonda: Noooo! They need work.

J: VO

Robert has lived at Project Renewal for over two years now. Everyday he goes to Fountain House; it's a community treatment program, where he works as a receptionist.

R: They call me Poppy.

J: VO

He's already had some jobs he's been paid for. He has friends and people tell me that when he doesn't show up they really miss him.

R: This is called Fellowship House, it's a clubhouse for people that have been in mental hospitals, and they try to help you work here.

R: Kathleen is like a social worker, she's not a case worker, but she welcomed me into her office.

Kathleen Rhoads: Working with Robert has been really great. It's been about 8 months that he's been a part of our unit. I wait to hear his good morning to me.

Full Assembly 1

R: I do say good morning, don't I?

Kathleen: Yes, you do.

R: Unless I'm late.

Kathleen: Unless you're a little grouchy.

Larry: What are you doing?

R: I'm taking a picture of Kathleen.

Larry: Let's see how that came out, hold it up.

R: you look happy.

V: Take a picture of me.

R: VO

All those pictures I made were tilted, you noticed that, don't you?

J: Yeah.

R: I wish I had a camera when I was a kid.

Larry: Do you still think of yourself as an artist?

R: Sometimes I do.

R: Oh, no. We got to walk up a step?

J: I don't know, let's go in and we'll see. Larry will tell us.

R: Two jackets or one? Two Jackets, huh?

J: Just, yeah, just get mine out.

Full Assembly 1

R: I'm at home here.

J: Yeah.

R: I can't sit on that.

J: VO

When we were taking the portraits at Leiberman's Studio, I was reminded again of how Robert loves the camera. He comes alive in a certain way and focuses in a certain way that he doesn't at other times, and it's like seeing the boy he once was still living inside the man he is now.

Larry: If you could say something to yourself then, to the nineteen-year old Robert, what would you say?

R: Have a good life and have a happy one and a healthy one. Which I've had, except for the hospitalizations. I've stayed out for 2 years, and in Staten Island also.

L: You feel the last 2 years have been good years?

R: Oh yeah. I haven't done anything to progress, but at least I'm not going backwards. I'm getting a little older, but that happens to everybody. I don't eat yogurt, because I don't think you should ask God for a longer life. If you have a long life, you have a long life.

R: Let's go back to someplace good to eat, OK Jay?

J: Yep, we'll see.

R: Who's paying, Larry?

J: You bet; hey, we're working, he pays.

R: We sure work, don't we?

J: It's...listen, it's OK, yeah.

R: I get too tired too fast though, you know? Maybe he'll show me some tapes later.

Full Assembly 1

THE END