

A Hard Place: Another Long Day Apart

Written, Directed, Produced by Kate Clere.

Narrated by Kerry Armstrong.

Second Nature Films and The Australian Film Commission, 2004. 15 mins.

Reviewed by Fiona Joy Green

A Hard Place: Another Long Day Apart is an aesthetically beautiful and emotionally touching film about the ongoing conflicts an Australian, white, middle-class, heterosexual mother experiences when she decides to place her two-year-old son in childcare while she works full-time for a wage. Through the melodic and soft-spoken voice of award-winning actress Kerry Armstrong, we learn of the intense love middle-aged Kate Clere has for her young son.

The 15-minute DVD opens with grey, grainy images taken by photographer Sarah Smuts-Kennedy of Clere at the seaside, seated on rocks with foaming water around her feet. It is here that she confesses to the audience, "I've been having a love affair for the last two years. I have to tell my husband; I never planned it like this. We said nothing would come between us."

Surrounded by early strains of a piano and a woman's wailing voice, Clere confides her feelings for this new love: "He is divine; I'm in love, drunk in love. His eyes are so bright, when he looks at me I melt. He has a great sense of humour; he makes me laugh. I learn so much from him. He sees the world through such trusting eyes."

In a soft, sensual voice, Clere speaks of how she adores watching her love from a distance and touching him. We see black-and-white still photograph images of mother and child at the water's edge, as she admits, "I love the feel of his skin. I love it when he touches me." She describes the intense and respectful moments of falling in love at the beginning of this new relationship.

The honesty and intensity of these feelings resonate with this viewer, who similarly fell in love with her own son over 19 years ago when he first entered her world. Like Clere, I marvelled at the gift of my child and wondered, as she does, whether all mothers feel this immense love for their children, and how strange it is "that more people don't speak out about this extraordinary love." In making this observation, Clere challenges the taboo of silence that surrounds the subject of the depth of love that some mothers feel for their children.

Understanding her intense feelings for her son also provides the context for her exploration of the complex tension she feels between her desire to cocoon herself with her son and her professional need to work. The imagery changes from black-and-white to colour, and the sound score from serenity to the clatter and chaos of city life. Mondays mean a shift in relationship and activity: "I'm torn from this love as I falter for my own life. I'm torn from my child as I earn a wage. I'm torn from his side and I hear him cry. I'm torn like

mothers across this strange city as I leave my greatest creation, my greatest love with someone else.”

Clere addresses the need to find childcare while she is pregnant to ensure a place for her yet-to-be-born child and reflects on this contradictory situation: “My child is part of this generation of children with weekend parents.” Accompanying this revelation are haunting colour images of her preschool son, first sitting in the middle of a colourless street playing with toys while grey-coloured adults walk by, and then sitting all alone on a deserted downtown crosswalk. Clere further acknowledges, “I’m part of this generation of mothers who is torn,” as she is shown standing alone and looking forlorn in the empty street. She articulates feelings of guilt, the need for independence, and her intense longing to maintain a connection with her son. As a mother she feels invisible, yet wants another baby to counter this sense of negation.

Clere’s film addresses the tension many urban Western women experience between the “me who wants to be a good mother versus the me who works a 40-hour week.” *A Hard Place* has international status with official selections at the Women in the Director’s Chair International Film Festival, Chicago; Shorts Film Festival, Adelaide; River Run International Film Festival, North Carolina; and St. Kilda Film Festival, Melbourne.

Because I Said So: 33 Mothers Write About Children, Sex, Men, Aging, Faith, Race & Themselves

Camille Peri and Kate Moses, eds.
New York: HarperCollins, 2005.

Reviewed by Jessica B. Burstrem

Camille Peri and Kate Moses’s *Because I Said So: 33 Mothers Write About Children, Sex, Men, Aging, Faith, Race & Themselves* is an exhilarating and vindicating collection of narratives by mothers who are coping with expectations for themselves. For instance, Fufkin Vollmayer must disregard her own single mother’s rage when she chooses to become a single mother herself. Mary Morris has to labour to not be an angry, controlling, frightening parent like her father. Karin L. Stanford comes to the decision to reject fairy tales and not remain silent about sexism within the Black community in order to be a good example to her daughter. Lisa Teasley leaves New York City to escape “mental slavery”—the racism that she and her multiracial family experienced there—which was hindering her ability to mother.