

Editor Beth Cramer Tries Plan B—Directing

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Documentary Explores Women Choosing Single Motherhood

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Beth Cramer, an editor at The Well, New York, has a two year old and an extremely supportive husband who really understands the business she's in. But she remembers a time when she was so focused on what she wanted to achieve through work, like so many women, that she almost forgot to have a baby.

So for her directorial debut she went on a journey to find women who felt so deeply about wanting to have children that they would do it without a partner. She found that this is a trend snowballing among women in their 30s to mid-40s, and she captures the stories of 14 of these women in her documentary, Plan B, Single Women Choosing Motherhood.

"As a new director I was amazed at how comfortable these women felt in telling me their stories. It gave me a lot of confidence knowing I could capture that on film. I learned it was about being a good listener and keeping this dialogue going as if we were friends," said Cramer, who spent 11 years at Red Car prior to The Well.

"By thinking as an editor, I could steer the conversation in a direction I knew would build the best structure. I think you can't help as an editor bringing that to what's happening when you are standing next to the camera."

Instead of a talking head documentary, Cramer's film weaves in and out and creates a conversation among 14 women who have never met. The women delve into the circumstances surrounding their decision, discussing options like invitro fertilization, artificial insemination, adoption and the thought process behind choosing a donor they knew versus an anonymous donor. They also chat about financial considerations, challenges, donor criteria and myths, support and much more in 54 minutes.

Cramer had 30 hours of footage to work with. Though she was concerned about it turning out dry because she used an interview style, the result is anything but—it's serious, emotional and often even funny.

For example, in addressing the issue of telling their child where they came from, one expectant mom says chuckling, "Now they have kids books about having two mommies, two daddies or I'm adopted—hopefully by the time he's ready to read, they'll have a book that says, 'I have a donor father' and I won't have to worry about how I'm going to talk about it."

"As a filmmaker and certainly being a first time director and having your work on the screen for the first time you sort of just hold your breath," said Cramer about the film's screening this fall at Tribeca Cinemas in Manhattan. "It was wonderful to sit in the audience and see them laughing at parts I didn't even know were that funny. I love talking to people about the film. They remember what the women said and have a connection to each one."

A second screening was held recently by New York Women in Film and Television.

Cramer is looking for distribution for the film, which she thinks would be perfect for HBO, Oxygen or the WE Network.

She always knew editing could help her become a good director. When she was a film student and aspiring director in college, one of her professors told her she had an instinct for editing.

So she became an editor thinking the experience could teach her to be a better director and that from there she would eventually make a lateral move. But she fell in love with the craft and built her career around editing instead of directing.

Now that she's gotten her feet wet in directing, Cramer would like to keep the directing doors open because she thinks it has made her a better editor, but she added, "By no means do I want to give up editing."

"It's been an interesting ride. So much has changed. I still love the 30-second and 60-second format. It taught me how to be concise and how to communicate quickly. I see how that does help me in my longer format work."

Cramer has cut commercials for clients such as Fidelity, Sprint, Chase Manhattan, ESPN, Avon, Victoria's Secret, Olay, to name a few. She has worked with such distinguished directors as Marcus Nispel, Gerard de Thame, Bob Giraldi, Leslie Dektor and Peter Goldschmidt. Throughout her tenure at Red Car and while at her current home at The Well, Cramer's experience has spanned commercials, documentaries, short films and music videos. Recent spots she has worked on include "Feel Beautiful" for Keri Lotion, which places women in famous works of art of women, and Botox Cosmetic's "Reasons," which addresses why women opt for Botox.

She is anxious to continue her commercial work following her directorial debut.

"What it made me realize is as a mother and as a woman how strong these sensibilities and life experiences can play in the editing room and on set. I think we as women can bring so much to the table because we know how to connect with people. It's given me a better perspective almost."

