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J'ai placé ma mère Review: Love as Lifeblood

RIDM 2022



BY ALLEGRA MOYLE · NOVEMBER 24, 2022 · REVIEWS / RIDM · 3 MINS READ

J'ai placé ma mère
(Canada, 75 min.)
Dir. Denys Desjardins

Canadians were horrified to learn of the disarray, neglect, and fatalities that occurred in long-term care homes over the course of the pandemic. Some of the worst cases came out of Quebec where hundreds of seniors died in isolation under the province's care. Filmmaker Denys Desjardins documents the course of events which led to his beloved mother falling victim to this healthcare scandal in an extremely personal film, *J'ai placé ma mère* (*I Lost My Mom*).

"She needs me," Desjardins pleads on the phone to a healthcare worker in an attempt to see his mother who is dying alone in the long-term care center (CHSLD) Notre-Dame-de-la-Merci, which stands facing the Bordeaux prison in Montreal. Eventually, due to her imminent death, he is permitted to spend ten minutes with her to say his final goodbyes. Sadly, she has already passed by the time Desjardins enters her room. "Her hand is still warm," he remarks during a lingering closeup of her pale lifeless hand in his.

An investigation into Desjardins' mother's death reveals that she died of pneumonia, disarr...

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An investigation into Desjardins' mother's death reveals that she died of respiratory distress and was unable to receive the urgent treatment she desperately needed. Instead, he discovers she was provided with end-of-life care without the consent of the family. In narration recited by Desjardins throughout the film, he reflects, "Whether or not this can be seen as euthanasia or *agicide*, I don't think my mother died with dignity."

This outcome is especially devastating since *J'ai placé ma mère* chronicles the years 2017 to 2020 as Desjardin and his sister embark on the noble, yet exhausting, quest to ensure their mother spends her final years in comfort, safety, and dignity. The film captures the many tiresome, and at times, confrontational phone calls his sister has with the CHSLD, fighting for and asserting her mother's right to housing with humane living conditions.

Presented like a video diary, the film makes use of many closeups of both Desjardins' mother and sister, reflecting the documentarian's intimacy with his subjects. As much as the documentary follows the final years of his mother's life, through his narration, old photographs, and home videos the film also serves as an ode to motherhood seen through the eyes of a devoted son. While the documentary consists of poignant social commentary, Desjardins' love for his mother is the film's lifeblood, which simultaneously adds to, and cuts through, the tragedy.

J'ai placé ma mère premiered at RIDM 2022.



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