

BAY WEEKLY.com

Volume 16, Issue 11 - March 13 - 19, 2008

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Pip and Zastrow: A Friendship in Black and White

Local filmmakers show how 60 years of friendship saved Annapolis

reviewed by **Diana Beechener**, Bay Weekly staff writer

They shouldn't have met. In segregated Annapolis, Roger 'Pip' Moyer grew up to be mayor, while Joseph 'Zastrow' Simms landed behind bars for a burglary conviction.

But they were both star basketball players, Pip at all-white Annapolis High School, Zastrow in a statewide black league. Even then, victory could be color blind. The Falcons recruited Pip to help them burn down The Flames, their archrivals.

Did they?

You'll have to see the movie to find out.

Award-winning documentarians Victoria Bruce, of Annapolis, and Karin Hayes know a good film when they see one. Still editing their documentary, directors Hayes and Bruce told Bay Weekly what to expect when Pip and Zastrow: An American Friendship premieres this Saturday at Maryland Hall.



"We found the story because our associate producer, Jerry Januszewski, was doing oral histories in the mid 1990s," recalls co-director Hayes. "He came across the story of Pip and Zastrow and how they came together [in the 1950s] through athletics when Pip joined an all-black basketball team."

"Karin and I had made two films about kidnapping in Colombia [South America]," says Bruce. "When we finished, I still remembered the story of Pip and Zastrow. We both agreed that there was a story there."

Armed with the oral histories, the filmmakers left their native Southern California for Annapolis. Over four and a half years, they split their time pouring through archives and collecting interviews. Maryland House Speaker Michael Busch and Pip's ex-wife, Mayor Ellen Moyer, contributed their memories of the duo. Annapolis' first African American policeman, George Phelps, narrates this tale, speaking about his experiences working with Pip and locking up Zastrow.

For the main material, the directors turned to Pip and Zastrow.

"Our characters opened up their lives," says Bruce. "There wasn't anything off limits for these guys." Hayes and Bruce followed the men through three years, documenting Pip's battle with Parkinson's — and subsequent surgery — and Zastrow's campaign for city council in 2005.

The friendship was refreshed in 1968 when the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. rocked black communities throughout the nation.

As news spread of the civil rights' leader's murder, blacks of Baltimore rampaged in rage, setting fires and looting.

"When Pip heard about Baltimore burning, he called Zastrow in jail," Bruce says. Arranging for Zastrow and officer Phelps to join him, Pip took to the streets, speaking to the people. While Baltimore burned, Annapolis remained quiet.

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As the filmmakers soon discovered, Pip and Zastrow staving off violent riots was only a chapter of their story. Throughout six decades, failed marriages, Parkinson's disease and the civil rights movement, the men remained best friends.

"The film has a lot of twists and turns. It explores layers of the people," says Bruce. "You don't want the film to be talking heads."

The directors struggled to condense 60 years of friendship into a feature length film. They decided that their documentary should be as diverse as their subjects: the first half of the film is a classic history chronicling the life and times of Pip and Zastrow through interviews, archive footage and animated pictures. For the modern-day subjects, the directors chose a cinema verité approach: filming Zastrow's reunion with a son he hadn't seen in 25 years and following Pip through his Parkinson's treatments.



Former Annapolis Mayor Pip Moyer and Zastrow Simms were star basketball players in their youth in Annapolis. Although their lives took very different turns, the two have remained friends for more than 60 years. Filmmakers Victoria Bruce and Karin Hayes have created a documentary of their lives that opens at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts.

"We decided that the way we told the story should mirror the times," Bruce says. "The music changes — we cut faster in the 1960s than we did in the 1940s. It's almost like two different films. You fall in love with these characters historically, then fall in love with them in modern day."

As the project grew, so did their budgetary needs. Already serving as crew and creators, the directors looked to the city of Annapolis for help. Then Anne Arundel County Executive Janet Owens led the support, helping the filmmakers pull funding from the Anne Arundel County Council.

"It was a struggle; it was a definite struggle, because we did everything. We were the sound guys, the cameramen, we got our own coffee," says Bruce, who has relocated to Annapolis.

"When I moved to Annapolis, I felt such a racial divide," Bruce says. "I thought, what a shame that there was still a divide. The story may make us want to talk about that again."

Karin Hayes is more pragmatic with her goals for the film.

Hayes says she hopes for many community screenings. "This is a special preview screening. This is really a first and we're hoping it will just grow from here." The directors have not planned their next screening yet. And, as Hayes says, "If someone wants to put it in the theatres, we're open to that too."

Pip and Zastrow: An American Friendship, previews 7pm March 15 @ Maryland Hall, 801 Chase St., Annapolis. \$13; rsvp: 410-280-5640; www.pipandzastrow.com.