

51 BIRCH STREET

a film by Doug Block

Priddy Brothers Entertainment presents
a Copacetic Pictures production
in association with HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films
a ZDF co-production, in cooperation with Arte

Produced by
DOUG BLOCK and LORI CHEATLE



Running Time: 88 Minutes

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A FILM BY DOUG BLOCK

CAPSULE SYNOPSIS

Documentary filmmaker Doug Block had every reason to believe his parents' 54-year marriage was a good one. But when his mother dies unexpectedly and his father swiftly marries his former secretary, he discovers two parents who are far more complex and troubled than he ever imagined. ***51 Birch Street*** is a riveting personal documentary that explores a universal human question – how much about your parents do you really want to know?

SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Doug Block had every reason to believe his parent's 54-year marriage was a good one. So he isn't prepared when, just a few months after his mother's unexpected death, his 83-year old father, Mike, phones to announce that he's moving to Florida to live with "Kitty", his secretary from 40 years before. Always close to his mother and equally distant from his father, he's stunned and suspicious.

When Mike and Kitty marry and sell the longtime family home, Doug returns to suburban Long Island with camera in hand for one last visit. And there, among the lifetime of memories being packed away forever, he discovers 3 large boxes filled with his mother's daily diaries going back well over 35 years.

Realizing he has only a few short weeks before the movers come and his dad will be gone for good, the veteran documentarian sticks around, determined to investigate the mystery of his parents' marriage. Through increasingly candid conversations with family members and friends, and constantly surprising diary revelations, Doug finally comes to peace with two parents who are far more complex and troubled than he ever imagined.

Both unexpectedly funny and heartbreaking, ***51 Birch Street*** is the first-person account of Block's unpredictable journey through a whirlwind of dramatic life-changing events: the death of his mother, the uncovering of decades of family secrets, and the ensuing reconciliation with his father. What begins as his own intimate, autobiographical story, soon evolves into a broader meditation on the universal themes of love, marriage, fidelity and the mystery of family.

51 Birch Street spans 60 years and 3 generations, and weaves together hundreds of faded snapshots, 8mm home movies and two decades of vérité footage. The result is a timeless tale of what can happen when our most fundamental assumptions about family are suddenly called into question.

51 Birch Street is a Copacetic Pictures production in association with HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films and Priddy Brothers Entertainment. It is a ZDF co-production in cooperation with Arte. The film is written, directed and photographed by Doug Block. It is produced by Doug Block and Lori Cheatle, and edited and co-written by Amy Seplin. For HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films, supervising producer is Lisa Heller and executive producer is Sheila Nevins. For Priddy Brothers Entertainment, executive producers are John and Ed Priddy. For ZDF/Arte, the executive producer is Doris Hepp.

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

51 Birch Street is a film I never set out to make. I mean, who in their right mind would choose to delve into some of the most personal aspects of their parents' relationship, much less reveal it for public consumption?

This was the farthest thing from my mind a few years ago when I went to visit our suburban family home for the last time. I did bring my digital camcorder with me, but it was just to capture the house I grew up in one last time for posterity. And maybe get to the bottom of a few things.

A lot had happened in the past year: my mother, who I was very close to, had died without much warning, and three months later my father, who I was not so close to, had moved in with his secretary from 40 years ago. They quickly married, sold the house, and now were about to leave the area for good. It was all pretty shocking in its suddenness. And while I certainly wanted to know more about my father and Kitty's relationship, I was also philosophical about it: Dad's 83 and, well, good for him, he's moving forward, life marches on, and all that.

Then I walked inside and saw our entire family history being packed away in boxes and it all hit me like a punch in the stomach: although I hadn't lived there in over 30 years, on some very primal level I still thought of this place as my home.

It soon became apparent that my father, who's from that generation of WW II veterans who rarely if ever talk about themselves, was not just willing but was eager to talk. And that my camera was facilitating the conversation by allowing me to ask the difficult questions I could never have asked otherwise. I saw a unique opportunity to get to know my father better, so I decided to keep coming back.

It was during my next visit that I asked Dad, offhandedly, if he missed Mom. "No," he replied. "It wasn't a loving association, just a functioning one." Since I had always thought my parent's 54-year marriage was a pretty model one, needless to say I was stunned.

I started to review the many hours of verité footage and interviews I'd shot with my parents over the years. I had done it originally just for my sisters and I to have as records of our family history, but now I was looking at it from a very different viewpoint. I also poured over the thousands of photos and slides my father, a photo hobbyist, had taken over the years, as well as a number of rolls of 8mm home movies he shot back in the early 50's.

It suddenly began to feel like telling my parents' story on film was pre-destined.

But then there were the 3 large boxes filled with my mothers' diaries. I wrestled for a long time over whether to even read them, and longer yet over whether to include them in the film. Later, during the many months of editing, I struggled with how to show them on screen. My mother was a very complicated person who I loved dearly. Trying to pick just the right words and phrases to do her justice, yet not overstep the bounds of propriety, was an enormous responsibility.

Along the way, a number of people asked if the film was therapy for me. Not really, I'd say. Therapy is where you go once a week for about 50 minutes and it costs maybe a hundred bucks a pop. During the two years of making *51 Birch Street*, I thought about my parents all day long.

I thought about them while lying in bed at night. They invaded my dreams. And let's not even talk about the cost of a feature documentary.

Ultimately, though, it's been a priceless experience. To be able to understand my parents better; to be able to pay tribute to them as fallible human beings who did the best they could; to get so much closer to my father; to gain closure with my past... This wasn't an easy film to make, by any means, but I feel very blessed to have been given the opportunity.

My greatest hope with *51 Birch Street* is that it resonates universally – that audiences across all cultures will see themselves and their own relationships with their parents in it. And that maybe, it will inspire them to reach out and talk with their parents.

Not that doing so will necessarily resolve things. As the film strongly suggests, we never really resolve things with our parents. But if we're lucky, we get the chance to make peace with them before it's too late.

Like I said, *51 Birch Street* is a film I never set out to make. But, looking back on it, I guess it's the film I was born to make.

51 BIRCH STREET **A FILM BY DOUG BLOCK**

CAST

MIKE BLOCK was born (in 1920), raised and educated in Brooklyn, NY. He returned home from the army and married Mina Vogel in 1947. In 1951, they bought a house and moved to Port Washington, where they raised their three children.

A mechanical engineer by trade, Mike worked as Chief Engineer, VP and Plant Manager for a number of different manufacturing companies in New York City and on Long Island. He eventually became a partner in a machine shop, then sold the business and retired in 1990.

After Mina's death in 2002, he re-connected with a former secretary, Carole "Kitty" Duffy, and they married in 2003. That fall, they sold the home in Port Washington and moved to Kitty's house in Key Largo, Florida. In 2005, they bought a house in Sun City Center, Florida, where they currently reside.

MINA BLOCK was born in 1923, and grew up in the Bronx, NY. She graduated from Brooklyn College in 1945, and married Mike Block in 1947, a year after he returned from combat overseas during World War II. Their first daughter, Ellen, was born in 1949, and Karen was born a year later. In 1951, the family moved to Port Washington, NY, where their third child, Doug, was born in 1953. From 1962 to 1964, Mina worked full time as a marketing researcher, and took occasional part-time jobs over the years as the kids grew older.

Mina's real passion was writing - she wrote a great deal of prose and poetry, and periodically contributed freelance articles to local newspapers. In addition, she was a longtime peace activist, and was an active board member of the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives for many years.

CAROL "KITTY" DUFFY (BLOCK) was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1935, and moved to Glen Cove, Long Island in 1949. In 1956, she began work as a secretary for a manufacturing plant. She married in 1958, and had 2 children. When she returned from her second maternity leave, her new boss was Mike Block.

Kitty eventually divorced her husband, remarried in 1968, had a third child, and moved to Key Largo, Florida. Her husband had a fatal heart attack in 1988. She owned and directed the Key Largo Bridge Club for 28 years. She has also worked as a bookkeeper, home nurse and driver.

ELLEN BLOCK has lived in suburban Boston for the past 14 years. Professionally, she is a Financial Analyst and Pricing Manager. For fun, she sings with a local chorus. As Doug's oldest sister, she would like to express her extreme pride in the accomplishments of her 'little brother'.

KAREN BLOCK ENGWALL, Doug Block's older sister, leads an "uneventful yet meaningful life" with Doug Engwall, her husband of 30 years, and children Beth and Dave. She works as a therapist at a university counseling service in central Connecticut. Despite the scene of the

wedding song filmed at Mike and Kitty's wedding, she and her family enjoy music very much, and frequently play various instruments together.

MARJORIE SILVER, Doug's wife, is a Professor of Law at Touro Law Center in Huntington, New York, where she teaches Civil Procedure and Professional Responsibility. Prof. Silver is currently editing a book entitled *The Affective Assistance of Counsel: Practicing Law as a Healing Profession*. She speaks frequently and has published numerous articles on the relationship among legal education, the practice of law, emotional competence and psychological-mindedness. She is the mother of Lucy, 17, and Josh, 31.

NATASHA SALTZMAN and her husband, Elliot, were close friends of Mike and Mina Block ever since moving to Birch Street in Port Washington in the early 60's. Natasha was in the first graduating class of Brandeis University in 1952. She then earned Masters Degrees from Hunter College (Sociology) and Adelphi University (Social Work). She divorced Elliot in 1994, retired from social work and moved to Eastham, Cape Cod, where she has remained active in Habitat and several cultural organizations. She has two children, and three grandchildren. Her hobbies are pottery and photography.

RABBI JONATHAN BLAKE joined the Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, NY as Associate Rabbi in July, 2003. Previously, Rabbi Blake served as Associate Rabbi and Director of Education at Temple Beth-El in Providence, Rhode Island from 2000 to 2003. He is a member of Rhode Island's Board of Rabbis and sits on the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Joint Commission for Sustaining Rabbinic Education. Rabbi Blake is a summa cum laude graduate of Amherst College, where he majored in English literature. In 2000, he received his ordination from Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Rabbi Blake is married to actor-singer Kelly McCormick.

SAMUEL OSHERSON is chair of the psychology faculty at the Fielding Graduate Institute, a clinical associate at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, and a psychotherapist in private practice. He is the author of a number of acclaimed books, including: *Finding Our Fathers*, *Rekindling the Flame*, and *The Passions of Fatherhood*.

51 BIRCH STREET **A FILM BY DOUG BLOCK**

FILMMAKER/CREW BIOS

DOUG BLOCK • Director, Producer, Writer, Camera

Doug Block is a multiple award-winning, New York-based documentary director, producer and cameraman. His first film, *The Heck With Hollywood!* (1991), wryly chronicled the trials and tribulations of three first-time independent filmmakers. It screened at over two dozen leading international film festivals before being released theatrically in the U.S. by Original Cinema. *Heck* was later broadcast throughout the world, including PBS and Bravo in the U.S.

Block's second feature was the Emmy-nominated film *Home Page* (1999), a look at the early days of online culture as personified by college student Justin Hall, now acknowledged as the web's first blogger. Called "Groundbreaking" by Roger Ebert, the film screened at the Sundance, Rotterdam, SXSW, Thessaloniki and Full Frame festivals, among others, and was broadcast on HBO, IFC and throughout Europe after a limited theatrical release.

In addition to his directing and camerawork, Block has helped produce some of the most acclaimed documentaries of the past two decades. He co-produced *Silverlake Life* (1993, dir. Peter Friedman), which was distributed by Zeitgeist Films in over 80 U.S. cities and won numerous awards, including the Peabody Award, Sundance Grand Jury Prize and Freedom of Expression Award, the Berlin Golden Teddy, the L.A. Film Critics Association award for Best Independent Film, the Prix Italia and the International Documentary Association's Distinguished Achievement Award. He also co-produced *Jupiter's Wife* (1995, dir. Michel Negroponte), an Emmy and Sundance award winning documentary feature about a homeless woman with a mysterious past. It was released theatrically in over 40 U.S. cities and broadcast on HBO/Cinemax, PBS, and internationally. Block was consulting producer and cameraman on *Love and Diane* (2002, dir. Jennifer Dworkin) a co-production of ITVS, BBC and Arte, which won the prestigious Independent Spirit Award, and co-produced *Paternal Instinct* (2004, dir. Murray Nossel), a co-production of HBO and BBC, about a gay couple's relationship with the surrogate mother of their child.

He is currently producing Esther Robinson's personal documentary, *The Danny Williams Story*, about her uncle, a promising young filmmaker who was Andy Warhol's lover at the time of his mysterious disappearance in 1966. With Lori Cheatle, he is also executive producing *American Harmony*, which follows several barbershop quartets over the course of a year to the international finals competition.

Block is the founder and co-host of The D-Word Community (www.d-word.com), an online community of documentary professionals from around the world. Started in 1999, The D-Word has grown to almost 2000 members from 77 countries. He lives in New York City with his wife of 20 years, Marjorie Silver, and their 17-year old daughter, Lucy.

LORI CHEATLE • Producer

Lori Cheatle is a filmmaker/producer working in both documentary and fiction feature films. Before *51 Birch Street*, she most recently produced and co-directed the documentary *This Land Is Your Land* (co-director Daisy Wright) that premiered at SXSW and has since screened across the U.S., and in Africa, Sweden, Germany, the UK and South Korea. The film was one of two feature documentaries recently selected for the 2006 Whitney Biennial, considered one of the most important surveys of contemporary art in America.

Lori co-produced *Dashiell Hammett. Detective. Writer.* (dir. Joshua Waletzky) for the PBS series American Masters, which premiered on PBS, aired in France on Gaumont TV, and is distributed by Winstar Video. For Pacific Street Films, she produced and co-directed (with Martin Taub) the documentary *From Swastika To Jim Crow*. Called by The Boston Herald, "...an inspiring portrait of race relations in America", *From Swastika To Jim Crow* premiered nationally on PBS. The film was shown worldwide in festivals and as part of an extensive outreach program, at over 100 locations including The National Civil Rights Museum, Lincoln Center, The Museum of African American Heritage and The Museum of Modern Art.

Lori previously worked with Doug Block as one of the Supervising Producers of the web-based *The D-Word: Essays In Documentary*, a compilation of short films on the art of documentary filmmaking. She produced the feature-length, documentary *Summer In Ivey* (dir. D. Wright and T. Rogoff), which is distributed worldwide by The Cinema Guild, and American Corner, a film about Vietnam-era veterans. The fiction and documentaries she has produced and associate produced have aired on Showtime, PBS, The Sundance Channel, Lifetime and Canal+. Previously, she was Director of the New York based company Petrified Films.

Lori is currently producing several projects, including *Live At The Fillmore East* with Amy Hobby, a film about rock impresario Bill Graham and his impact on the music business, set against the backdrop of Graham's legendary New York City music hall. The film is directed by Academy-award winner Leon Gast (*When We Were Kings*) and renowned photographer Amalie R. Rothschild.

JOHN AND ED PRIDDY • Executive Producers

John and Ed Priddy, Co-Founders of Priddy Brothers Entertainment develop, produce and distribute independent films that explore with respect, grace and artistry the depth and breadth of the human experience. The company champions high-quality film projects created by self-energized, entrepreneurial filmmakers passionate about their art and its message.

Staunch supporters of young filmmakers, the Priddys were instrumental in launching the Windrider Forum which takes place each year during the Sundance Film Festival. The Forum includes lively, creative workshops, and discussions which allow both cutting-edge graduate and undergraduate film students to interact with the year's top film projects. John and Ed are long-time sponsors of the Angelus Student Film Awards and creators of the Triumph Award. The Priddys are executive producers of award-winning documentaries: *39 Pounds of Love*, Doug Block's *51 Birch Street* and Hilla Medalia's soon to be completed *Daughters*. Upcoming projects include Craig Detweiler's new film *Wayfaring Strangers*.

AMY SEPLIN • Editor

Amy Seplin has worked in post-production as an editor and post-production supervisor. She has edited a variety of documentaries, specials and narrative features, including *In Search Of Al Qaeda*, for the PBS series Frontline and *Witness To An Execution*, a one-hour documentary on capital punishment, which was broadcast on MSNBC. Amy was an editor of the ABC series Hopkins 24/7, which received the Dupont Award.

Other editing credits include *It's Right Now '00*, produced by Nanette Burstein and Brett Morgen for the Sundance Channel; *Colonial House* for PBS and Channel 4; and as an additional editor on *Cinderella Season*, directed by Jon Alpert for HBO. Amy has worked as an assistant editor on both fiction and documentary features, including *Swimsuit USA: America The Beautiful*, directed by Susan Froemke and Albert Maysles; *The Life And Times Of LBJ*, directed by David

Grubin, and the feature *Tales From The Darkside*. Amy's short film *Creatures Of Instinct* screened at several film festivals including Sundance, Edinburgh and Melbourne and was featured in Interview magazine. She is a graduate of the Columbia University Film Division.

DAVID RIVELLO • Associate Editor and Visual Effects Designer

Dave Rivello entered his mid-twenties as co-president of a graphic design studio he co-founded with four college pals in 2002. It was the first of several earnest attempts to avoid a real job that would play themselves out over the next two-and-a-half years.

After moving to Brooklyn in the spring of 2003, he spent several months as a design assistant at The New York Times magazine, then several more as an artists' creative assistant at a downtown artists-in-residence program. In early 2004, he made a move into documentary film under New York City producer/director Doug Block.

Dave earned his undergraduate degree at Brown University, where he studied literature, journalism and the arts. He served a year as editor-in-chief of the Brown Daily Herald, one of America's oldest collegiate daily newspapers. He spends his free time painting and playing the drums.

H. SCOTT SALINAS • Composer

Playing guitar since the age of twelve, H. Scott Salinas began his music career on the small island of St. Croix, where he became known as an accomplished sideman, touring the island in reggae and blues bands. After graduating from Princeton University and Berklee College of Music, Scott became the youngest person ever to be named Grand Prize Winner in the Turner Classic Movies Young Film Composers Competition. For this, Scott was commissioned to score the 1928 Lon Chaney film *Laugh, Clown, Laugh*, which aired on Turner Classic Movies to wide critical acclaim.

He has worked at Verité Music with film composer Sheldon Mirowitz, writing and orchestrating music for television films, documentaries, and commercials. In 2004, Scott joined Machine Head, where his most recent work includes *Edison*, an action thriller starring Kevin Spacey, Morgan Freeman, LL Cool J, and Justin Timberlake; *Conventioneers*, a love story and political satire taking place at none other than the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York.

MACHINE HEAD • Music Production

Machine Head is a music and sound design company founded by award winning Sound Designer Stephen Dewey in 1991. Following his personal success working on Academy Award nominated films *Jacob's Ladder* and *Black Rain*, Stephen set out to build Machine Head, a collective of unique talents who differentiate themselves from others in music production with their collaborative efforts and diverse resources. Some of their credits include: *The Matrix Trilogy*, *Freddy vs. Jason*, *The Laramie Project*, *John Q*, *Animatrix*, *Chronicles of Riddick-Dark Fury*, *Raise Your Voice* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Machine Head has also produced award winning music and sound design for numerous commercial campaigns.

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A FILM BY DOUG BLOCK

CREDIT LIST

Priddy Brothers Entertainment presents
a Copacetic Pictures production
in association with HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films
A ZDF co-production
in cooperation with Arte

Written, Photographed and Directed by
DOUG BLOCK

Produced by
DOUG BLOCK and LORI CHEATLE

Edited and Co-Written by
AMY SEPLIN

Music by
MACHINE HEAD

Composer
H. SCOTT SALINAS

Associate Editor and Visual Effects Designer
DAVID RIVELLO

Consulting Producer
LINDA MORGENSTERN

Consulting Editor
MONA DAVIS

Additional Camera
LUCY BLOCK
JOCELYN GLATZER
DAVID RIVELLO

Post Production Consultant
DAVID MENESES

After Effects Artists
DAVID MENESES
MICHAEL WEI

Narration Recording
TODD GRIFFIN

On Line Editor
STEVE PEQUIGNOT
Glue Editing & Design

Sound Edit and Mix
MARGARET CRIMMINS
GREG SMITH
Dog Bark Sound

Producer's Assistant
VALENTINA CANAVESIO

Production Assistants
KEVIN GIERMEK
ADRIENE IMBRIACO
ROSA JURJEVICS
ANDREW MCKAY
DAVID MUEHL
RACHEL SHUMAN
BEN VERSHBOW

Archival Footage and Still Photographs Courtesy of:

Mike Block
Mina Block
John Golomb
Carol "Kitty" Block
The Internet Archive
Samuel Osherson

Featuring

Mike Block
Mina Block
Carol "Kitty" Block
Karen Engwall
Ellen Block
Marjorie Silver
Lucy Block
Josh Silver
Doug Engwall
Beth Engwall
David Engwall
Lara & Jamie Vitiello
Abigail Kra & Chaim Dov Friedman
Robyn & James Ulbrich
Kim Landau & Mike Feinstein
"Feathers"

Natasha Saltzman
Joshua Vogel
Samuel Osherson
Rabbi Jonathan Blake
Mina Bobek
George & Ruth Lotker
Dan Kurshan
Bea & Irv Alpert
Kara Schocken Aborn
Sahr Mohammed Ally
Kelly Kortman
Hope Litoff
Susan Xiong and Bo Peng
Esther Robinson
Jennifer Hyjack

Music Clearances
PEARL LIEBERMAN

For Machine Head

Additional Music: FRANÇOIS-PAUL AÏCHE & ADAM SCHIFF
Executive Music Producer: PATTY CHOW DEWEY & VICKI ORDESHOOK
Music Producer: MAGGIE TRAN
Music Atmospheres: TOBIAS ENHUS
Additional Music Editing: DUSTIN CAMILLERI
Live Strings by: LUDVIG GIRDLAND
Music Mixed by: H. SCOTT SALINAS
Music Recorded by: KIP SMEDLEY

<p>"ONLY YOU (AND YOU ALONE)" Written by Buck Ram Performed by The Platters Courtesy of Universal Music Group</p> <p>"WE ARE FAMILY" Written by Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers Performed by Ric Mango Orchestra Courtesy of Warner Music Group</p>	<p>"QUEEN CAROLINE" Written by Carl Orff Performed by Friends Seminary Lower School Courtesy of Friends Seminary</p> <p>"A POLICEMAN'S LIFE IS NOT A HAPPY ONE" Written by William S. Gilbert and Arthur S. Sullivan Sung by Josh Silver and Lucy Block</p> <p>"I FLUNK ADULTERY" Written and performed by Joshua Vogel</p>
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Executive Producers
JOHN PRIDDY and ED PRIDDY

for ZDF/Arte
Executive Producer
DORIS HEPP

for HBO/Cinemax Reel Life
Supervising Producer
LISA HELLER

Executive Producer
SHEILA NEVINS

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