

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK PRESENTS THE PBS PREMIERE OF ***A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE***, THE AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY ABOUT ONE FAMILY'S STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TEENAGE PREGNANCY, AND SCHOOL FAILURE WITH THE HELP OF A UNIQUE NUN AND THE COMMUNITY CENTER SHE FOUNDED

*"The Brady Bunch does not exist."  
- Luis, 16*

A 16-year-old boy wreaks havoc on the streets of Sunset Park, is kicked out of his home, drops out of school, and learns his girlfriend is pregnant. His 14-year-old sister wants nothing to do with her newborn son, leaves the child's care to her mother, slips into a severe depression and tries to kill herself. In the face of violence and deep despair, this troubled family turns to a dedicated nun – Sister Geraldine Tobia – whose devotion to them never wavers.

Produced and directed by Roger Weisberg and Murray Nossel and filmed over the course of three years, ***A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE*** is the poignant story of these teenagers, Luis and Elena, the next generation of the Santiago family Weisberg profiled in his 1983 critically acclaimed PBS piece ***OLD ENOUGH TO DO TIME***. To be broadcast starting Tuesday, October 1 on PBS (check local listings; series will air in New York October 24 at 10 p.m. (ET)), the cinema verité documentary is a close-up look at domestic life in the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn, the struggles of at-risk teens, the inspiring woman who refuses to give up on them, and the stabilizing force of a unique family support organization.

"The kind of realism and raw emotion we were fortunate enough to capture in ***A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE*** is what motivates me to make non-fiction films," said Weisberg. "The tireless devotion of a selfless nun and the courage and candor of an extraordinary family enabled us to tell an intimate

story about coping with domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and school failure that mirrors the struggles of families in embattled communities all over the country.”

The one-hour film, which received a 2002 CINE Golden Eagle Award and the Platinum Award at the Worldfest Houston Film Festival, chronicles the family’s triumphs, set-backs and day-to-day struggles, capturing what would normally be private, highly charged emotions. Like *SOUND AND FURY*, Weisberg’s recent Academy Award-nominated documentary about a family torn apart by the cochlear implant controversy, *A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE* takes viewers inside a painful family drama. The cameras are there when Luis accuses his mother of choosing her husband over her children. They are there when Elena admits she tried to take her own life, and when she accuses her mother of planning to put her in a home for troubled youth.

Through all this turmoil, Sister Geraldine and the Center for Family Life she founded in the late 1970s serve as beacons of hope. The center offers an alternate outlet for the pain and anger that often drive Sunset Park’s youngsters to violence, crime and drug use.

Sister Geraldine explains in the film, “What we’ve worked on is finding a different context within which the adolescent can be the leader. The after-school program [for example] is an opportunity to bring that street life indoors. It helps young people understand how they can be giving, powerful and capable by showing them the same strengths and the same skills in a different way. The role that they have that’s anti-social, let’s give them that role in a social environment.”

As a psychologist on the faculty of the Columbia University School of Social Work, Nossel, the film’s co-producer and co-director, has been conducting ethnographic research at the Center for Family Life since 1996. He

said, “From the outset, I observed that the center’s unusual methods were not based on pat formulations. Rather, they reflected the work of visionary, creative people who were strongly committed to their mission and were profoundly respectful of the people they served.”

Both Elena and Luis work at the center, and many of the film’s more touching moments take place there – a party celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary; Elena nurturing the youngsters for whom she cares; Luis encouraging children as they toil over art projects.

As *A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE* draws to a close, tragedy strikes the community: Sister Geraldine loses the courageous battle she has fought against cancer. But rather than resort to the self-destructive behavior that inspired the center’s establishment 20 years ago, Elena, Luis and the entire community find strength in the lessons they learned there.

Luis remembers Sister Geraldine fondly: “She would never quit ... I think if she had a chance to talk to Satan himself, she could straighten him out.”

Luis and Elena’s mother observes, “If it weren’t for her, who knows what route my son would have taken, or Elena. I know she’s in heaven, but she will always be a part of my heart.”

A comprehensive Web site delves further into the domestic problems that similar families across America are facing. Features include character profiles, an introduction to the Center for Family Life, referrals to local family support organizations throughout the country, educational materials for teachers, and in-depth information about the filmmakers. The site’s address is [www.pbs.org/familytale](http://www.pbs.org/familytale).

*A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE* is a production of Public Policy Productions, Inc., in association with Thirteen/WNET New York.

Funding for **A BROOKLYN FAMILY TALE** is provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Program, Child Welfare Fund, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Freddie Mac Foundation, Charles A. Frueauff Foundation, Fund for the City of New York, Herman Goldman Foundation, George Gund Foundation, The Hite Foundation, Albert Kunstadter Family Foundation, A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, Felix and Elizabeth Rohatyn Foundation, Sarah I. Schieffelin Residuary Trust, and Silverweed Foundation.

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Thu, Jul 31, 2008