



Interview: MADE IN BOISE Director Beth Aala #AFIDOCs2019

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Screening tonight, MADE IN BOISE tells the story of a community of women risking their own health for humanity's sake and the emotional complications that come with the journey of surrogacy.

Four women find purpose carrying babies for strangers in the conservative heartland of Boise, Idaho — the unregulated and unofficial — surrogacy capital — of the United States. As the surrogacy industry booms globally, MADE IN BOISE tells the story of a community of women risking their own health for humanity's sake and the emotional complications that come with the journey of surrogacy. AFI spoke with director Beth Aala about her new film.

MADE IN BOISE plays as part of the Spectrum program at AFI DOCS at the AFI Silver Theatre in Silver Spring, MD on Sunday, June 23. Buy tickets to the screening [here](#).

AFI: What led you to pursue documentary filmmaking?

I've always loved movies as a kid — musicals, classics, big blockbuster hits. When I moved to New York after college, I was awed by the incredibly diverse communities and interesting backgrounds of all the people around me. It was then that I realized that real stories are what truly captivate me.

AFI: How did you become interested in this story? What inspired you to tell it?

My best friend from college was having fertility issues, and, after five failed IVF attempts and three painful miscarriages, she asked if I would carry her child for her. Paid surrogacy is illegal in New York, and she couldn't pay someone to do it. Instead, she had to turn to her family and friends, and she asked me. Thankfully, she eventually got pregnant and successfully carried, so that I didn't have to do it. But that was my first real encounter with surrogacy, when I witnessed such a painful period around infertility — of someone very close to me.

AFI: How did you find and connect with the subjects in MADE IN BOISE?

A childhood friend is a labor and delivery nurse at Boise's local hospital, St. Luke's Boise Medical Center. She shared how common it was for the staff to do surrogacy, so I was immediately fascinated. When I visited Boise for the first time, I really got a sense that there was in fact a whole community around the practice, and I began filming on the spot.



AFI: What kinds of obstacles did you face while making the film?

Surrogacy is very misunderstood and still very much stigmatized. Those who do know about surrogacy might presume the women are being exploitive or have presumptions of why a person chose this path. There were frustrating moments trying to get people to understand that it's almost always a last resort for people who want to have children and that it's incredibly complex.

AFI: What do you want audiences to walk away with after watching the film?

Surrogacy is not what many people think it is, and it's an incredibly emotional and logistically complicated process.

AFI: Why do you think documentary films are important today?

Documentaries can transport you into a world you otherwise wouldn't know anything about. Most people who have seen this film (or early versions of it) always tell me how surprised or moved they were or that they had no idea this was happening in our country, particularly in Boise. I too lacked the knowledge about it when I started making the film. So documentaries can build empathy in a way that's really powerful and effective because you are immersed in someone's life. For a short amount of time you can walk in their shoes or at least walk beside them and experience intimately what they are going through.



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