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***Mimi and Dona* Premieres on *Independent Lens*
Monday, November 23, 2015 on PBS**

An Unforgettable Story of Familial Love and Heartbreaking Choices

"Heart-wrenching. The film is as unflinching as it is beautiful, chronicling difficult decision-making that comes to involve the whole extended family." — *The New York Times*



Mimi and Dona, 1998.
Credit: Thornton family.

(San Francisco, CA) – What happens when love runs out of time? For 92-year-old Mimi, who has spent her life caring for 64-year-old Dona, a daughter with an intellectual disability, it means facing the inevitable — the likelihood that she will not outlive her daughter and the need to find her a new home. This poignant, heartbreaking, and sometimes humorous documentary traces the story of a wonderfully quirky and deeply connected mother-daughter duo — filmmaker Sophie Sartain's grandmother and aunt. ***Mimi and Dona*** premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, November 23, 2015, 10:30-11:30PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

"*Mimi and Dona* shows us what long-term care-giving looks like through the intimate, compassionate lens of filmmaker Sophie Sartain and her family," said Lois

Vossen, executive producer of *Independent Lens*. "More than ever, people from all walks of life are struggling with this issue, trying to find the best ways to care for their aging or disabled family members. There are no easy solutions, but by bravely telling her own family's story, Sartain's film asks us to consider what happens to the most vulnerable when their families cannot care for them. And is there something our society can do to help those facing these most difficult of choices?"

Since Mimi Thornton's husband died in 1968, she has lived with her daughter Dona in their suburban home in Dallas. Dona has an intellectual disability and possibly undiagnosed autism. Over the years, Mimi and Dona have carved out a happy life for themselves, one filled with errands, church, weekly visits to the beauty parlor, and nightly doses of *Wheel of Fortune*. Frozen in time, they have lived off their Social Security checks, inside the same four walls, for forty years. But Mimi and Dona's symbiotic existence is about to end. Mimi's family has decided that she can no longer care for Dona, and Dona must leave home to live in a state-run institution. After 64



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years, Mimi will have an empty nest and Dona will suddenly be on her own.

In this powerfully personal documentary, Sartain chronicles the painful process of separating her aunt and grandmother. She also interviews her own mother and other family members, reaching back to explore the complicated legacy of Dona's disability on three generations of her Texas family and their history of family members with mental and developmental disabilities. Over the six years of filming, "I have gained new understanding and admiration of my mother as the sibling of a person with a disability; she represents countless brothers and sisters who overcome difficult childhoods only to assume the responsibility of caring for their adult siblings," says Sartain. "I have also grown as a parent to my own children — in particular to my son who is on the autism spectrum — by witnessing the awe-inspiring love Mimi gave Dona her entire life."

Mimi and Dona's story speaks for the millions of families struggling with these issues. An estimated 4.6 million Americans have an intellectual or developmental disability and these individuals are living longer than ever before. And more than 75% of them live at home with family. What happens to people like Dona when aging family members can no longer care for them?

Visit *Mimi and Dona* on pbs.org (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/>), which features information about the film.

About the Filmmaker

Sophie Sartain (Director/Writer/Producer) is an award-winning writer for print, film, television, and digital media. Sartain's credits include the 2012 documentary *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* (writer/producer), the 2014 documentary *Above and Beyond* (writer) and the 2008 film *Blessed Is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh* (writer/co-producer). Sartain's past positions include executive director of editorial services for MGM Home Entertainment and managing editor of Sony Online Entertainment. She has contributed as a writer on several film and media projects, including *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (PBS/POV) and *The Rich in America* (A&E). As a grant writer, she has raised more than \$1 million for documentary projects. In 2011, her grant proposal for a PBS documentary on photographer Dorothea Lange was awarded a prestigious NEH production grant. As a freelance writer, her clients have included *Los Angeles Magazine*, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, Universal Studios, New Line Home Entertainment, CBS Sports Radio, and ABC Radio Networks.





CREDITS

Produced, Written, and Directed by
Edited by
Featuring Music by
Camera
Additional Cinematography

Executive Producer
Executive Producer
Executive Producer for ITVS
Supervising Producer for ITVS
Consulting Producers

Consulting Editor

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About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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