

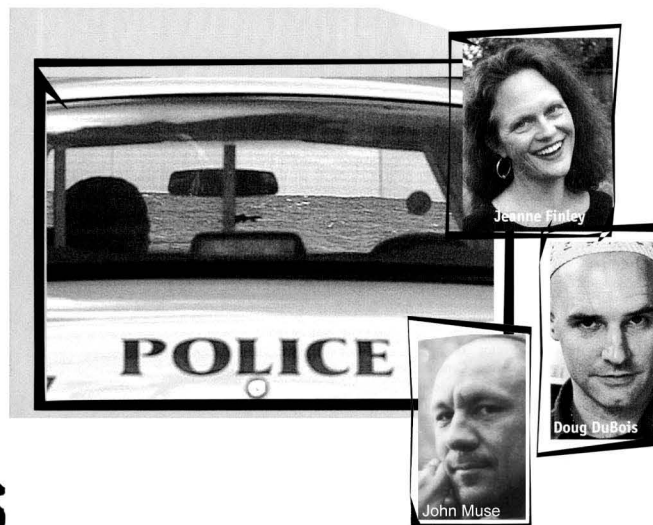
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THE MAGAZINE OF FILM ARTS FOUNDATION

Short Supply

The Film Arts Festival Places a Premium on Quality Shorts

by K.M. Soehnlein



➔ Stolen Moments

Loss Prevention Is an Essay on Mothers and Daughters and Shoplifting

Jeanne Finley is saying goodbye to the last of a crowd of six-year-olds, guests at her daughter's slumber party. Since I've called to talk about Finley's film *LOSS PREVENTION*—which tells the story of an elderly shoplifter as seen from her daughter's point of view—I can't help but ask the director, "So what would you do if your daughter was caught shoplifting?"

It turns out Finley was an "avid shoplifter" through her teens. "I loved to shoplift, so I'd understand why she did it, but I'd have to impress upon my daughter the moral perspective I've developed as an adult."

Finley's adolescent vice drew her to *LOSS PREVENTION*'s subject matter, although the initial push came from her friend Barbara Anderson, whose 79-year-old mother had been arrested in Florida for shoplifting. Finley, with co-director Doug DuBois and collaborator John Muse, traveled to the Sunshine State and interviewed Anderson's mother, along with other elderly shoplifters, law enforcement officials and the head of the local Senior Citizen Shoplifting Prevention Program. The issue, it turned out, was more widespread than they had known.

From the start, the filmmakers knew they didn't want a documentary full of talking heads, and since most of their interview subjects requested anonymity, such a standard take wasn't possible anyway. "It was perfect for radio," Finley recalls, "but for film it posed a challenge." (Indeed, the original recordings were edited into a radio essay

for *This American Life*.) The solution? A rather non-documentary idea: a fictionalized script. "I took the interviews, along with Barbara's stories about her mom, and added some pure invention," says Finley, describing how she created the voiceover narration of a daughter whose mother is caught stealing aspirin from a Wal-Mart. So does the resulting film qualify as a documentary? Finley answers, "It crosses the line back and forth."

Visually, *LOSS PREVENTION* looks a lot like an experimental film—from its enigmatic opening image of a purse suspended in bubbling water, to its evocative Super-8 home-movie footage (actually staged between Finley and her daughter), to the Polaroids of shoplifters pinned to one store's "Wall of Shame." Also included is footage shot at the Fountain of Youth, a kitschy theme park based on Ponce de León's historic expedition. "It seemed related to these folks for whom shoplifting is a way of keeping themselves young," says Finley.

LOSS PREVENTION is filled with poignant humor, which was part of the filmmakers' strategy. "John Muse and I use this tag line to describe our projects: 'Jovial tales for tragic sensibilities,'" Finley says with a laugh. "Looking at culture, society and individual trauma, and understanding them through humor, is something that we really enjoy doing." Finley next hopes to make a fiction film about sex and gambling, subjects related to the broader themes of *LOSS PREVENTION*. "It's all about compulsion, you know?" □