

Nightshade Films and Frankly Speaking Films present

JEANNETTE

A Film by Maris Curran



**USA / 2022 / 78 min / Color / Documentary
in English & Spanish**

Festival Press Kit

2022 San Francisco International Film Festival (World Premiere)
Winner, Documentary Audience Award

2022 Frameline: The San Francisco International LGBTQ+ Film Festival (June 16 - 26, 2022)
Screening In Person: Friday, June 17, 1:30pm, Castro Theatre
Digital: June 24 - June 30

Additional Festivals To Be Announced Shortly

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LOG LINE

JEANNETTE is an intimate vérité documentary about a survivor of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando. A lesbian Puerto Rican and single mother, Jeannette is a competitive bodybuilder who uses her unforgettable strength to transform her life as she struggles to heal in the aftermath of trauma.

SYNOPSIS

Filmed in striking vérité, this portrait of competitive bodybuilder and lesbian single mother, **JEANNETTE** unfolds as an intimate story of balancing the relentlessness of daily existence with the realities of living through trauma. Set in the aftermath of Orlando's Pulse nightclub mass shooting, Jeannette seeks support and healing through community while she continues to coach fellow survivors at the gym, contend with a strained relationship with her Puerto Rican mother, and raise her teenage son. As her life begins to calm, Hurricane María hits Puerto Rico and Jeannette is thrown back into crisis mode.

Skirting sensationalism to focus on the tenderness of healing, director Maris Curran has created an unforgettable window into one woman's life -- her strength and vulnerability -- in the aftermath of trauma.

JEANNETTE is a film about resilience that gives an audience the opportunity to move past the headlines and ask: in the wake of tragedy, how do we move toward wholeness?

PRINCIPAL CREDITS

Director	Maris Curran
Producers	Maris Curran, Jon Coplon
Executive Producers	Jen Rainin, Rivkah Beth Medow, Penelope Wong, Crystal Gurin
Editors	Eduardo Serrano, Katrina Taylor
Cinematographer	Jerry Henry
Music	Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman

PRINCIPAL CAST

Jeannette Feliciano	Mother, Competitive Bodybuilder, Personal Fitness Trainer, Pulse Survivor
Yvens "Eazzy" Carrenard	Jeannette's Best Friend, Personal Trainer, Pulse Survivor
Anthony McCoy	Jeannette's Teenage Son
Anna Feliciano	Jeannette's Mother
Laila Ortiz	Jeannette's Older Sister, Lives in Puerto Rico
Ana Cabrera	Laila's Wife, Jeannette's Sister-in-law
Yaris Cruz	Jeannette's girlfriend



DIRECTOR STATEMENT

Maris Curran, Director / Producer

When we met, Jeannette and I recognized something of ourselves in each other. We're both tough feminine queer women who have dealt with sexual and physical violence. At our core, each of us was formed in response to violence we faced as girls and later women and much of our adult lives have been spent trying to articulate the personal impact of violence and yet not be defined by it. It became clear as we spent time together that surviving Pulse opened wounds from the past for Jeannette — wounds that she was eager to heal and help others work through as well. It was in the question: what do we do with our trauma? that Jeannette and I connected. Each of us use our voice to spark conversations with the hope that dialogue leads to greater awareness, empathy and action. This connection and a level of shared experiences created an opening — a space for initial conversations that fostered trust and a common language. This formed the foundation of our collaboration.

Our paths crossed when Jeannette was cast in an anti-discrimination piece I was hired to direct. Our pre-interview ran hours; another mass shooting occurred the night before, leaving her with headlines to contend with. Jeannette was raw and our conversation was intense and emotional. After wrapping production, I couldn't shake the feeling that our work together wasn't done. I called her a few days later to check in and see how the shoot went from her perspective. Trusting does not come easily to Jeannette and she told me she felt seen. Truly including her in the process gave her ownership of the images we captured. Our conversation went deep and by the end of the call, we'd planned the first shoot for what would become this film. The scope of the project was not perfectly defined, but the goal was set — to make a film that put the audience in Jeannette's shoes to spark empathy for her experience, to ignite conversations around the prevalence of violence and identify the support needed in the aftermath of tragedies like Pulse. For me as a filmmaker, Jeannette's

story had the power to delve into the complicated realm of the aftermath of trauma — a time steeped more in questions than answers. A time after news cameras have packed up and folks are left to fend for themselves — a place where many of us live.



JEANNETTE is a vérité documentary. The film is shot handheld and the camera is observational and direct. I set out to create an intensely intimate film that honestly reflects Jeannette's world. The two most important elements to achieve this are my profound trusting relationship with Jeannette and deep-reaching relationships with the talented collaborators with whom I worked. Despite my many connections to Jeannette and the themes of the film, I am an outsider to her world. I have a level of access and privilege afforded by race, education and class. This fact was not side stepped in the making of the film, rather incorporated into the fabric of the project. Creating a safe space, not only for Jeannette, but for her friends and family who are also in the film was tantamount. Many in her world speak Spanish first, so we had a Spanish speaking crew. (I grew up bilingual.) I worked on the film with Jerry Henry, a DP with whom I've shot three films. He's the most talented vérité cinematographer I know and is markedly respectful in how he works. We have a shorthand for how to shoot visually, how to inhabit private space and approach sensitive emotional material. Everyone who worked on the film believed in the project and was dedicated to bringing their expertise as well as their humanity. The crew aside from myself, was entirely POC and most importantly, were people who put Jeannette at ease. In Orlando, that meant hiring Puerto Rican folks from within her fitness community. One of the primary ethical challenges when making a film about trauma is that it necessarily elicits painful emotions and memories. By not having on-camera interviews, I purposefully avoided putting Jeannette and those around her on the spot to 'perform' their trauma in teary interviews. Instead, I set the film in the present tense and used her voice as a guide. The voiceover in the film is comprised of three audio only conversations Jeannette and I had over several years. We set aside those days to spend together and talk; we took our time

and no other production happened.

For me as a filmmaker, navigating ethical choices is intertwined with my artistic vision. At the end of the day, the film is a manifestation of a relationship Jeannette and I forged over four and a half years.

The gaze of this film is from one woman looking directly to another.



PERSONAL STATEMENT

Jeannette Feliciano, Subject

I look at this film like I look at life — I want this film to inspire people to keep going; regardless of what they may be going through we are all warriors but it takes the strong mental willingness of never quitting. We all struggle, we are all going through something and I hope this film gives people an example of resilience for their own lives. I want people to watch the film and see themselves. I don't feel that my story is so different than other people, the situation at hand may be different in its description but the feeling of depression, anxiety, sadness, the feeling of feeling lost is the common demeanor of those who struggle through trials and tribulations. The question we can ask ourself is What do we learn from hardship? How do we use struggle to help others? More than anything, I don't want people to look at what I went through and think their trauma is insignificant. Because it's not. Their stories matter too. I want to fight for more positivity in our community. I'm a mother, and it's important to me to set an example of pushing past judgement toward love. This is what I'm fighting for and that's what I hope comes through in the film.

Participating in the film was part of my process of healing. I don't get that many opportunities to open up and honestly, I don't trust that easily. Getting to a trusting place really had to do with my relationship with Maris. There's that initial impulse that says, who is this white

American woman? But she took the time to also be vulnerable with me about parallels in our stories and we realized that we share a lot. And she made me feel comfortable — it was a priority for her. We sat down for several recorded conversations throughout the years of working on the film. For me, it was an opportunity to really talk and let go. With Maris I really felt like this woman across from me understands me and is not going to judge me. At a certain point we'd shared so much she stopped being just a director and was a friend... honestly, even more, she's a sister. So when we had these conversations, there was a lot of letting go that I needed to do. In some ways these conversations let me stop holding onto things from the past and continue into my future.

Unexpectedly, the film gave me the opportunity to get closer to my mom. When I saw the film for the first time I was struck by how much my mom loves me. And it was really important to see her love, it's something I've fought for in my life. If you watch the film, you'll see we have a real fight on camera. I almost never fight with my mom and to have a camera around... wow. But would you believe, it actually brought us closer? I feel like I was able to understand her better and seeing her love softened my heart to her. This has allowed our relationship to flourish and given me the opportunity to see and feel that my mom truly loves me. That's a gift.

KEY FILMMAKER BIOS

Maris Curran, Director / Producer

Maris Curran's films have shown at Berlinale, TIFF, MoMA, the NY Times Op-Docs, and PBS's Independent Lens. Her debut narrative feature, *FIVE NIGHTS IN MAINE*, starring David Oyelowo, Dianne Wiest, and Rosie Perez, premiered at TIFF and was released theatrically in 2016. Her work has been supported by Cinereach, the Tribeca Film Institute, IFP, Film Independent, Frameline, and SFFILM. Maris recently completed two short award-winning documentaries, *WHILE I YET LIVE* about five quilters and freedom fighters from Gee's Bend, Alabama and *THE MAN IS THE MUSIC* about the artist and musician Lonnie Holley. She holds an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, participated in the Whitney Independent Study Program, and was a Fulbright Fellow. Raised in Philly, Maris now lives in Los Angeles with her partner and young son.

Jon Coplon, Producer

Jon is a co-founder of Italy-based Stayblack Productions. He most recently produced *A CHIARA*, by Jonas Carpignano; the film won the Europa Cinema Label for Best European Film at Directors' Fortnight at Cannes in 2021 and is being released by Neon. *A CIAMBRA*, which also premiered at Cannes, in 2017, was executive produced by Martin Scorsese and was Italy's selection for the 2018 Academy Awards. Short films he's produced have played Cannes, Venice, Berlinale, New York Film Festival, SxSW, and New Directors New Films. He previously produced the short documentaries, *THE MAN IS THE MUSIC* and *WHILE I YET LIVE*, by Maris Curran, currently on the NYTimes Op-Docs.

Katrina Taylor, Editor

Katrina Taylor is drawn to character-driven stories with an emphasis on emotional accuracy, social relevance, cinematic storytelling, and the exploration of sonic

landscapes within the documentary genre. Most recently, Katrina served as editor for the feature documentary WILDLAND, a two time Emmy winner, including best editing. Other credits include Netflix's The Confession Tapes produced by A24, AWAVENA (2018 Sundance), BOONE (2016 SXSW, Berlinale), and the second and third seasons of Showtime's COUPLES THERAPY. She was previously a contributing editor at the Sundance Institute Edit and Story Labs.

Eduardo Serrano, Editor

Eduardo graduated with a MFA in Editing from the National Film & Television School (NFTS) in England and lives and works in Brazil. He cut DIVINE LOVE and NEON BULL by one of Brazil's most acclaimed directors, Gabriel Mascaro. NEON BULL won top prizes at Venice and TIFF. He also cut AQUARIUS and BACURAU, by Kleber Mendonça Filho, which were distributed in more than 70 countries. Both films screened in competition at Cannes, and BACURAU won the Cannes Jury Prize. Eduardo works between fiction and documentary and enjoys blending experimentation with traditional cinematic forms.

Jerry Henry, Cinematographer

Jerry Henry is a Los Angeles-based documentary cinematographer and member of the Academy with over twenty years of experience. He shot the Oscar-nominated documentary EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP, Sundance favorite, CITY OF GOLD, and Peabody Award-winner AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY, Netflix' HIGH ON THE HOG, and the forthcoming 1619 PROJECT. He was awarded the Gordon Parks Emerging African American Filmmaker Award and has an MFA from UCLA.

Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman, Composers

Mexican composers Leo Heiblum and Jacobo Lieberman have been making music for film for over twenty years. Their credits include fiction works such as BIRDS OF PASSAGE and MARIA FULL OF GRACE, and the Academy Award-shortlisted documentary film THE SILENCE OF OTHERS, TEMPESTAD, as well as WHO IS DAYANI CRISTAL. Leo recently completed a collaboration with Phillip Glass and Patti Smith.

FILM INFORMATION

Country:	USA
Festivals:	2022 San Francisco International Film Festival (World Premiere) *Additional festivals to be announced shortly
Filming Locations:	Orlando, FL & Puerto Rico
Running Time:	78 minutes
Film Format / Camera:	HD