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Lonnie Frazier, dir. *Box of Rain*. Mutiny Films, 2022. 78 min. Available via Vimeo.com.

DAVE JANNETTA

When home doesn't feel like home, where do you go? This is the question posed at the beginning of Lonnie Frazier's documentary *Box of Rain*. It serves as an evocative if loose framing device for the filmmaker's intensely personal, idiosyncratic journey through the Deadhead experience. Using talking-head interviews, archival footage, voice-over narration, and contemporary B-roll, Frazier has stitched together a tapestry that serves as a journey of homage and catharsis that takes her across the country and toward the warm embrace of Grateful Dead music and the Deadhead community.

The film opens with the gut-wrenching revelation of Frazier's violent rape when she was still in high school, by two individuals she had known for much of her life. The experience left her lost, hopeless, and searching. At the suggestion of a friend, she set out on a road trip to put some physical space between her and the harrowing ordeal. The film she has made is a combination of a posteriori reflection of her original journey combined with a retracing of some of those steps in the present day. The documentary gives her a way to reflect on what her original experience in the scene meant to her and for her ability to move beyond her trauma to the life she leads today. The film captures casual conversations with the friends she was with on the trip and interviews with people who were part of the broader scene she experienced at Dead shows, constructing a narrative comprising eight chapters: "The Trip," "The Parking Lot Scene," "The Show," "Community," "Memories," "The Magic," "Change," and "Coming Home."

Most of the chapters begin with various Deadheads attempting to answer the question, "What is a Deadhead?" The responses are as varied as the tie-dye on display throughout the film, but generally focus on the ideals of love, acceptance, belonging, and shared values—all readily

understandable as the qualities that Frazier needed when she first set out. No exact dates are given, but we can surmise that mental health services and resources for victims of sexual violence were not readily available. Even today those resources are woefully inadequate. At one point in the film Frazier says of the Dead scene, “I felt like I was seen as a woman with more to offer than what they wanted to take from me.” Of the multiple paths her life could have taken after the rape, many could have ended badly. Instead, she discovered a community, found love, and received support—and more than twenty years later, made a film to honor and acknowledge the people and music that enabled her to thrive.

Although Frazier presents us with a very specific framework for the film, the documentary is a more meandering conversation that flows toward the general rather than the specific. While her line of interview prompts may have been the result of a desire to answer those questions for herself, it turns into an overly broad examination of the Dead scene that feels divorced from her original, very personal, premise. This is not to discount Frazier’s experience as a shaping arc in the documentary, nor the value of the film overall as a revealing historical snapshot; in both cases, it succeeds. But from a film studies standpoint, the narrative feels as if it could have been richer. There could have been parallel and/or intersecting narratives of trauma leading to redemption in the Grateful Dead scene, or even other music fan communities. Or, staying closer to the personal cast of the story, Frazier could have talked more about what her life is like today and how she believes her journey with the Dead influenced it. Addressing trauma is a lifelong experience; one wonders if Frazier sought professional therapy, and if so, how that contrasted with the more grass-roots therapy she found in the Deadhead scene. What does she think would have happened had she not found the Grateful Dead? Frazier has commented that the decision to include her own story in the film came after the project had gotten underway, but that also explains why the connection between the interviewees in the documentary and her own experience feels minimal. This suggests a missed opportunity. Frazier’s story is powerful; it should be the central element in the film, with the world of the Dead as foundation, backdrop, and foil. Instead, it’s the other way around in the film.

All documentaries face the question of audience. That is especially problematic here. For Deadheads already familiar with the milieu, the film offers little more than a personal retreading of familiar ground. It is a pleasant place to spend some time but feels a lot like conversing with fellow fans at Shakedown before a show, or sitting at a bar listening to road-wise Deadheads reliving past experiences. Indeed, several of the interviews are exactly that. While that is part of the film's appeal, that is unlikely to convert the uninitiated or kindle interest in those not already curious. Because Frazier's story pops up intermittently, it feels unanchored and at times aimless. And while the chapters do present general topics, much of the material feels multivalenced, as if they could have been swapped around or categorized under any number of the headings without sacrificing the narrative.

Grateful Dead documentaries always run into the problem of music, and *Box of Rain* is no exception. Like *End of the Road*, *Tie-Dyed*, and other documentaries, the film was unable to include any Grateful Dead music. The original music by Nicholas Paré does fit the mood, and the inclusion of David Gans's song "Down to Eugene" makes an explicit nod to the theme of hitting the road to see the Grateful Dead, as the lyrics state. Yet that, too, feels a little blunt—not just because of the lyrics, but also for its repetition, both at the beginning and again over the end credits. But without any Grateful Dead music, which is the foundation of the story, the soundtrack leaves a strange dissonance, almost jarring when juxtaposed against the often superb archival footage and evocative photographs.

These shortcomings do not undercut the significance of the film. *Box of Rain* is a deeply personal and courageous work. Toward the end of the film, Frazier describes how the process of creating it gave her a voice. That process took her on a journey that was in many ways the parallel of her original trip, decades earlier, providing her with the opportunity to continue looking for answers, camaraderie, and comfort. For both fans and scholars, the achievement of *Box of Rain* may lie in its sincere depiction of the healing power of the Dead phenomenon, not only at its zenith but as it continues today.

DAVE JANNETTA is Assistant Professor at Cal Poly Humboldt and an award-winning documentary and narrative filmmaker. His debut documentary feature, *Love and Terror on the Howling Plains of Nowhere*, premiered at the Hot Docs International Film Festival and has been featured at Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival, DOC NYC, the Bend Film Festival, and The Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, where it won the Big Sky Award. He holds an MFA in Film Production from Temple University and is an alumnus of Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School.