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people were making that effort.

**S.Z.:** What drew you to James Chasse's story?

**B.L.:** What really attracted me to "Alien Boy" was the chance to tell two stories: one is Jim's personal life and the other is the almost detective story about what exactly happened that day. It was about crossing all of the T's and dotting all the I's in terms of the family's civil suit and following the case through all of its permutations.

How do you tell the story of a person who is no longer alive? How do you get their point of view and their special personality into the film? And that was a question the producer, Jason Renaud, editor, Andrew Saunderson, director for photography, John Campbell and I always ask ourselves: How are we honoring Jim's story? How are we helping the audience understand him?

**S.Z.:** What are your thoughts about the death of Michael Brown and the events in Ferguson?

**B.L.:** The tragic, avoidable death of Michael Brown of course reminds me of what happened to James Chasse. In both instances, police took drastic actions that resulted in the deaths of unarmed men and, after much public outcry, grand juries failed to indict the officer or officers involved.

There are two responses by police and local government that I think would go a long way in making the public — and in particular people of color and/or people coping with mental illness — feel safer: 1. Require all police officers to wear a camera. 2. In cases of alleged police misconduct, require an outside special prosecutor to present evidence to a grand jury. The first measure would create at least the possibility of an "objective truth" that would protect the officers against false allegations and protect the public against police cover-ups. The second measure would alleviate the untenable situation in which D.A.s now find themselves: presenting cases to grand juries against police officers who are, after all, their colleagues.

My hope is that the justified outrage we all feel after what happened to Michael Brown and James Chasse could somehow be focused and concentrated into meaningful civic action. That, I think, is the best way to honor the memories of these two men.

I saw on Facebook that three Portland police officers had posted: "I am Darren Wilson." I'd like to think that somewhere in our police force of over 600 officers, there

are at least three who would proclaim: "I am Michael Brown" or "I am James Chasse." Because I know that many officers join the force and put their lives on the line because of a deep calling to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

**S.Z.:** Mental health and, I would say addiction, seem to be a couple of prevailing themes in your work. What is your interest in this topic? What draws you to your subjects?

**B.L.:** I was really lucky that my grandparents, who were divorced, were both big parts of my life. My grandfather, his name was Maurice J. Hill, he was a wonderful guy. In many ways he was like a father to me. He was also a binge drinker. He would go weeks and even months without a drink and then he would just drink until he was passed out.

There are large stretches of my life when I would spend every weekend with them because my mom worked nights. I would have this experience were we would have plans to go the Blazer game on Saturday night, for instance. I would show up at his apartment and he would just be stumbling drunk. We would still go to the game. We would be watching the game and then I would get a tap on the shoulder. It would be security saying "will you come with me." And they would say, "Your grandpa passed out. You've got to take him home."

**S.Z.:** Wow. How old were you?

**B.L.:** I was like 9 or 10. So I had all of these experiences where I would be in public with that person: the whole restaurant or the whole crowd (wherever you are) the whole crowd is looking at us, "Whoa. That person is drunk."

I think I had an early affinity to kind of understand what it feels like to be the one that doesn't fit in or is different.

Through luck or God's grace or whatever, I dodged that biological bullet of being an addict, but I never forgot the humanity of the person who is suffering.

I always thought that if I had the chance, I would try to use my art form to try to help tell those stories: the humanity within that

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person. They are more than just their worst, weakest moments or their disease. There's more to them than that.

**S.Z.:** Sure. You don't hate someone because they have diabetes and their blood sugar drops and they pass out. You don't do that when the disease is diabetes ...

**B.L.:** Exactly.

**S.Z.:** So you're working on a new film?

**B.L.:** I am. I'm lucky to have received a grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council to make a film about an incredible program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, which is the women's prison in Wilsonville. It's called the Family Preservation Project. What they do is they bring the children of the inmate moms into the prisons two Saturdays a month for these intense, three-hour sessions where the women get to be with their kids in a community room. There is no plexiglass between mother and child. They get to read to their kids, play games, dance, eat, nap, cuddle. For those precious three hours, they get to be moms and the kids get to be kids.

Another thing the program does is help the women take an in-depth look at their lives and the choices they've made and really help them to understand that they are people that made bad choices rather than bad people. That is a huge distinction as we all know. It's hard to do anything from a perspective of "I'm a bad person." It's much more empowering to do something from the idea of, "I'm a person who made a bad choice perhaps around addiction and if can deal with my addiction issues, then my choices continue to get better and better."

The program does a lot of wonderful things including something called a genogram, which is where each woman diagrams her family history. They draw it, kind of like a personalized map. They decide the main themes that have shaped their lives. It could be mental illness or addiction or abuse or trauma, a medical catastrophe — whatever it is. They make a family tree and show how all these different people have been impacted by it. It's a really powerful tool that helps the women realize that there

are forces outside themselves that contributed to where they are and it doesn't in any way excuse their choices, but what it does is it gives those choices a new perspective.

I've been there as they present the genogram to the class. You can almost see a certain weight lifting as each woman shares her genogram with the class. I've been so impressed with the program. It's all about accountability and positive change. Not once have I heard any of the women say, "Oh I shouldn't be in here" or "I didn't do the crime." No. It's like: "I have these issues and this is what I'm doing to work on them."

These families are hard hit by addiction or poverty.

**S.Z.:** And it's generational. Sometimes grandma, mom, sister or child find themselves in the same facility.

**B.L.:** Exactly, so these families are scrambling to absorb the kid whose mom is now in prison. And they aren't all in Portland (Coffee Creek is the only female prison facility in the state of Oregon), so some of the families (of the incarcerated) are in Salem or Eugene or wherever, and suddenly this already strapped family has to absorb this child and then figure out how to get the resources together to go to Coffee Creek so the kid can have visitation with mom.

The great thing about the Family Preservation Project is that it provide gas cards, which may not sound like a big deal, but ...

**S.Z.:** It's huge.

**B.L.:** It's the difference between a child getting to see their mother or not. The program also provides a small respite for the child's family caregiver. And this is huge — it also provides early childhood education. These are families that if the schooling isn't paid for, it's questionable if they could get together the money to pay for preschool.

All of this (programming) is on the chopping block. The department of corrections has cut the program and it will end on Jan. 3. I can't understand how we, as a society could possibly decide that this is a good program to shut down.


I've done this enough (cinéma vérité filmmaking) that I feel like I've got a pretty good barometer when something is really working and change is meaningful and happening in front of me. I always feel like that in this program.

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