

Ikchee (Ikhbayar Amgaabazar) and Odgoo (Odgerel Ayusch)
take care of Mother Camel and Baby Camel.



JULIANE GREGOR, THINKFILM, 2004.

Separation Anxiety

Reconciliation

THE STORY OF THE WEeping CAMEL:

Nonfiction. Directed by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni, based on an idea by Davaa and Batbayar Davgadorj. Student producer, Tobias N. Siebert. First Assistant Director, Jiska Rickels. Cinematography, Luigi Falorni. Camera assistant, Sebastian Grundt. Sound recordist, Marc Meusinger. Editor, Anja Pohl. Sound design, Ansgar Frerich, Tatjana Jakob. Sound mixer, Hans-Dieter Desinger. Starring Odgerel Ayusch, Uganbaatar Ikhbayar, Enkhbulgan Ikhbayar, Ikhbayar Amgaabazar, Munkhbayer Lhagvaa. Also, Ingen Temee and Botok. In association with National Geographic World Films. ThinkFilm, 2004. PG. 90 minutes.

This remarkable nonfiction film was shot in the Gobi Desert in Southern Mongolia by a multi-ethnic documentary film crew, some from National Geographic World Films. Independent directors Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni met at film school in Munich. The stars of the show are members of a cross-generational herder family who live in three yurts in a relatively fertile section of the great desert.

The animal stars are Ingen Temee (Mother Camel) and Botok (Baby Camel), a rare white camel. They are a special pair to the filmmakers. This mother was the last of 20 pregnant camels in the herd to give birth and the only one to reject her baby. She did so following a harrowing birth that would have claimed both their lives without human intervention. A simple drama — the mother will not let the baby nurse — provides the plot line for this heartfelt, ethnographic film essay. In the Gobi, nighttime temperatures can be extremely cold (20 below), and outrageous windstorms (100 mph) may roar in at any time. A weakened baby camel will not survive for long.

Among the four generations living there, the central character is the beautiful, resourceful young mother, Odgoo (Odgerel Ayusch). She works very hard in the house, with the children and with the animals. Her husband, Ikchee (Ikhbayar Amgaabazar), is also a hard worker. He takes care of the 60 camels and 300 goats and sheep, with help from the other men in the family. Odgoo and Ikchee have three sons: Dude (Enkhbulgan Ikhbayar), the teenage elder brother; Ugna (Uganbaatar Ikhbayar), the younger brother; and baby brother, Guntee (Guntbaatar Ikhbayar). Family members include aged grandparents and other relatives.

Sound makes the film truly memorable — especially the high keening howl the neglected baby camel makes. It is one of

the most plaintive, heartbreaking sounds I have ever heard. The human caretakers, Odgoo and Ikchee, make affirming, calming sounds to the mother camel as they try to persuade her to accept the baby. Their voices invoke the sound their nomadic ancestors made to distressed camels. But Mother Camel is not easily soothed, and the family fears it will lose the baby.

These hardy people come from a culture with a ritual to call upon when they need help. The family sends the oldest boys, Dude and Ugna, to request a musician to come and play for the disconsolate mother. It's an old tradition, and legend has it that upon hearing the violin play, the mother camel weeps and accepts her baby. But first Dude has to lure young Ugna away from the seduction of the television set he encounters and falls in love with.

I'm surprised that people living in this remote, inhospitable land developed a healing ritual that extends to their livestock. Relationships of that order are unknown in our mainstream culture, although I believe something similar exists in farming and ranching communities. In urban America, most of us don't have long-lived, widespread traditions of caring for each other, much less our animal companions. The absence of such cultural tools adds to our national spiritual malaise.

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So, if you get buzzed out by the Eugene Celebration, come check out this film. It provides a way to connect with the silence, sounds, colors and beauty of an endangered way of life, in a country far, far away. Birth sequence may be too strong for very young children.

The Story of the Weeping Camel opens Friday, Sept. 17 at the Bijou, with high recommendations. **CW**

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