

# Family Living

The Portland Observer



June Cross, above front, with her mother Norma.  
**PBS airdate: Tuesday, November 26, 9 p.m., 120 minutes.**

Growing up, Frontline producer June Cross lived two very different lives. During the school year, she lived in Atlantic City as the foster child of an African-American family--the "niece" of a school teacher and county clerk. On summer vacation, she lived in the shadow of Hollywood as part of a white show business family with Norma, her biological mother, and stepfather, television star Larry Storch. Norma, who left June's father--African-American vaudeville performer Jimmy Cross--had given June away when she became "too dark to pass for white."

In "Secret Daughter", airing Tuesday, November 26, at 9 a.m., on PBS (check local listings), producer Cross takes Frontline viewers on an epic journey across the racial divide, into the hidden world of Hollywood and black vaudeville and deep into complicated relationship between a daughter and the mother who gave her away.

"This film was a journey to uncover feelings I never knew I had when I was young," says June Cross. "I was raised as an only child in the bosom of the black middle class: nurtured, supported, encouraged. But my own family's real story was a mystery to me. I wanted to find out what had happened to me and why it had happened."

Producer Cross interviews distant relatives, close family members, and Jimmy Cross's entertainment contemporaries, including comedian Jerry Lewis, to reconstruct the mosaic of her life. She explores her father's history, tracking down old friends, exposing

the racial tapestry of show business in the post-war era as well as forming a picture of a man she harbored anger toward her entire life.

Jimmy Cross was half of the comedy team "Stump & Stumpy" and had appeared in Irving Berlin's 1943 film This Is the Army, starring Ronald Reagan. But to this day, neither he nor any of the black singer-dancers receives screen credit for their performances. The documentary reveals that although blacks couldn't share the stage with whites, backstage the races mixed freely. But the on-stage segregation meant many black acts never got the recognition they deserved.

June's stepfather, Larry Storch, who starred in the Warner Bros. TV comedy F-Troop during the mid-sixties, says he was among those who used to go Harlem's Apollo Theatre and get ideas for material from the black comics timing from the black acts, including "Stump & Stumpy."

Producer Cross went to discover what led to her mother's decision to give her away. Did Norma make the decision in her daughter's best interest or to maintain her own social respectability? Cross grapples with her mother's dilemma as she tries to convince her to appear in an on-camera interview, which would reveal their secret to all.

In 1952, Norma came to New York and met Jimmy Cross. June was born two years later. However, as Jimmy's career declined, he began to abuse alcohol and their relationship became increasingly volatile. In 1957, Norma

## SECRET DAUGHTER

took June and moved to an apartment on New York's West Side, ending a five-year relationship with Jimmy Cross. During the next year and a half, Norma began to feel the pressure of raising a black child in a segregated society. She became convinced that being brought up in an all-white world would ruin June's sense of identity. When June was four, Norma sent her to live with her African-American "Aunt" Peggy in Atlantic City. Norma had gotten to know the Bush's when she and Jimmy Cross rented an apartment in the Bush's house when Jimmy played Atlantic City in the fifties.

"I didn't think it was right for you to be brought up in an entirely white household and neighborhood and life," Norma tells June. "I knew you were going to have problems. You can't blend in when you're different."

But Norma was not concerned about her daughter's sense of self. She married Larry Storch in 1961, and they moved to Hollywood two years later. Larry Storch was an emerging star. He was on the cover of TV Guide. Norma was afraid her new husband's career would be destroyed if the truth about June were discovered--that the Hollywood of the 1960s was not ready for a white man who'd taken in his wife's illegitimate black daughter. When the Warner Bros. publicity department was taking photos of the families of the stars of F-Troop, Norma decided to tell them that June was the Storch's adopted child. This kind of "cover story" was a familiar and painful part of June's Hollywood life.

But even today Norma fears her rich and socially glamorous friends will think less of her if they find out she has a black daughter. At a party thrown by one of Norma's friends, she keeps her distance from June fearing her secret might be uncovered.

"My story is far from unique," says Cross. "The census used to keep track of mulatto children. In 1910, there were just over two million of us, a number that dropped by around half a million after the Great Migration north enabled some 'pas' as white in their new environments."

Cross discovers that her father's side of the family had mixed racial heritage going back to slavery days, and her mother's side may have included a woman who "passed" for white. Her journey uncovers a cousin

on her father's side in Philadelphia and a half-sister, Lynda Gravatt, who is an accomplished actress.

Cross's camera confronts some racial stereotypes of her own when she goes to meet her mother's Mormon cousins in Idaho. "I was seized by conflicting emotions...their sincerity versus the reality I think Mormon racism perpetrated in my own life," says

Cross.

Cross finally comes to terms with her father's memory when she goes to Harlem and discovers some home movies of Jimmy Cross standing outside the Apollo Theatre holding a baby.

"It took me a couple of more replays before it hit me...that the baby was me," says June. "This is the only picture of us I've ever seen. I played it over and over."

And, ultimately, Cross finds a full-er understanding of and forgiveness

for her mother's decision.

"The way I look at it, she was smart enough to know she couldn't provide a supportive place for a black girl, and she loved me enough to give me to someone who could," says Cross. "I don't feel any anger towards her for that. As hard as it's been, I honor her for that."

"Secret Daughter" is written and produced by June Cross and co-produced by John Baynard and Jean-Philippe Boucaut.

## Holiday ceremonial remembrance

Me, Too. & Company Adult Group Facilitator, Nancy Stratte, M.A. will speak on the topic of ceremonial remembrances during the holidays.

Stratte will tell how a simple act of remembrance or ritual - such as lighting a candle in memory of the loved one before holiday festivities commence - can play an important

part in the healing process for those grieving that loss.

Stratte will speak in conjunction with Mary Lou Cook, co-author of the new book "You can Help Someone Who's Grieving" at Borders Books (708 SW Third, Portland) on Wednesday, November 13, 1996 at 7 pm.

Me, Too. & Company is a free,

eight-week children's grief support group sponsored by Providence Health System's Providence Bridges for Children, Providence Child Center, Kaiser-Permanente Hospice, Legacy Visiting Nurses Association Hospice and the Oregon Hospice Association. Groups are held three times a year in east and west-side locations.

## Pregnancy not required services

Traditionally, accessing case management and goal setting was only available to pregnant girls through social services agencies.

However in collaboration with the Housing Authority of Portland and Campfire Boys and Girls will kick-

off "Learning to Win: A Program for girls Age 11-13" on November 19th, 6pm until 8pm at 8920 N. Woolsey.

"Learning to Win", is a specialized curriculum aimed at minority girls with emphasis on math, grammar, computer skills, socialization

and pregnancy prevention.

"This is a culturally competent, performance-based curriculum that incorporates the family as partners to challenge and prepare girls for the 21st century," said Lanita Duke, coordinator of Gift Family services.

"We have a community-based team of talented women who will expect of these young ladies no less than what we expected from our own daughters," Duke added.

The kick-off will include a buffet-style dinner, introduction and orientation into the program.

Gift is the acronym for Gang Influenced Female Team. "Learning to Win" is open to girls living in North Portland. For more information call Lanita Duke at 285-9871.

## Important!!! Important!!! Parent and Student Night

To discuss how Measure 11, Curfew, and the new Truancy Law will impact you and our young people. At the Peninsula Park Community Center, Thurs. Nov. 21, 1996; 6:00pm - 7:30pm.

Program Sponsored by TLC-TNT and Portland Police-the Great program

Free non competitive recreation for younger children.

Refreshments will be served.

Call 916-5669 for other questions.

## Clackamas Women's Services

Clackamas Women's Services in conjunction with Portland Women's Crisis line is offering a Domestic Violence Support group for battered lesbians. The group is free and confidential. Call Joyce at 232-9751 or Toni at 722-2366.

## Non-profit's Day of Caring

The to-do lists of over 50 health and human care agencies in Multnomah County were severely cut with the help of hundreds of volunteers from United Way's Day of Caring. The annual event matches volunteer teams with hands-on projects at agency sites throughout Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties in Oregon and Clark County in Washington. Over 2,200 volunteers completed hundreds of projects at

106 sites over two days, providing 6,600 hours of free labor valued at close to \$80,000.

"The volunteers were highly motivated and required almost no guidance," says a representative from The Parry Center for Children. "The benefit for volunteers is immense. A volunteer from Willamette Industries said the event, "I liked working for a good cause and the work was badly needed."

### BUYERS SALE

# BIG SAVINGS

Prices Effective 11/13/96 thru 11/19/96 at your nearby Safeway store.

**Safeway Orange Juice**

- 12-OZ.
- SAVE up to 62¢

57¢

**Beef Chuck Blade Roast**

- 7-Bone Roast \$1.09 lb.
- SAVE up to 80¢ lb.

99¢ lb.

**Red and Golden Delicious Apples**

- Northwest grown

39¢ lb.

Look For Your Safeway Weekly Shopping Guide In Your Oregonian FOOD day in the Portland Metro Area ...And Save More Shopping At Safeway!

Enjoy Extra Savings With The SAFEWAY EXTRA In-Store Savings Guide Available at your Safeway store.