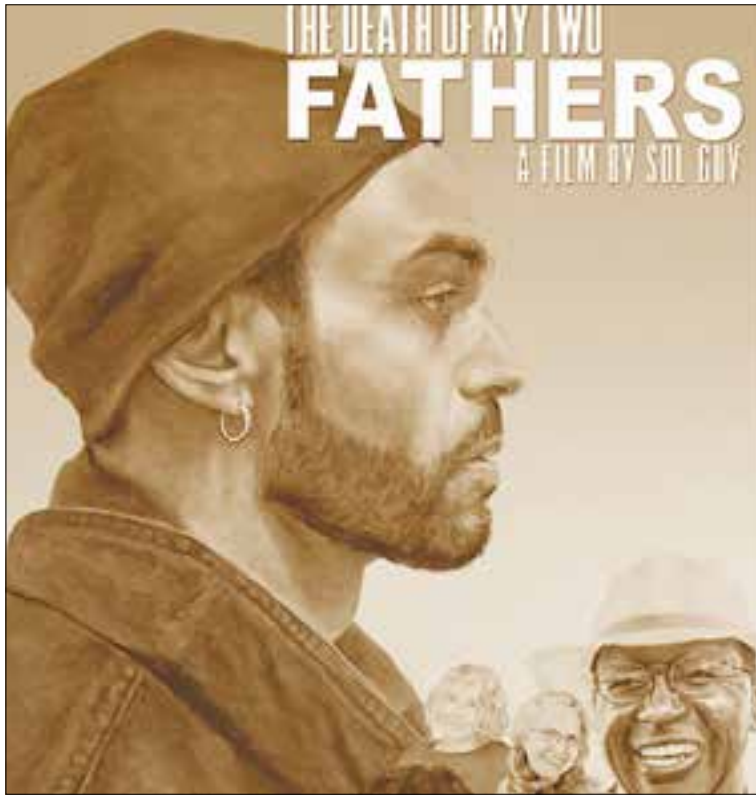


# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

## Our Ancestors and Our Legacies



Presented at the recent Portland Film Festival, "The Death of My Two Fathers" by Sol Guy captured a sense of how our ancestors and our legacies live inside each of us. For the latest viewing options, visit [thedeathofmytwofathers.com](http://thedeathofmytwofathers.com).

### Films explore fatherhood

#### OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY  
DARLEEN  
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What does it mean to be a father? A man? A black man? A person? What does it mean to offer a legacy to one's children that honors the truth in all its complexity? Two documentaries at the recent Portland Film Festival offered courageous ways into these questions.

I suppose by conventional measures, "The Death of My Two Fathers" would be considered a small and intimate film, a personal exploration of legacy by one man, a son of an African American man and a white Jewish-American woman. But by approaching this film as spiritual and personal work, director Sol Guy has captured a sense of how our ancestors and our legacies live inside each of us, beyond time and even when we're not ready to look. Inquiring when he was ready, inspired by a desire to deepen connections with his own children, Guy's engagement of his own spiritual work offers benefit to all of us.

Guy grew up around white people in British Columbia; he and his sister and his father were generally the only Black people in his world. Toward the end of a battle with kidney cancer, his father,

William Guy, filmed an extended message to his five children with three different partners (including two children whom he had left behind as a young man in Kansas City) informing them of the story of his life. His son Sol Guy carried the six VHS tapes around for 20 years before finally watching them; losing his beloved and somehow mysterious father as a long man had been painful to Guy, and for those 20 years he was not quite ready to sit with the complexity of his father's story.

Why wasn't he ready before then? Guy handles that question gingerly; why do any of us avoid inquiring into the legacies that live inside us? As the son of an African American man, something in Guy may have sensed that the story would be a painful one, and indeed his father's life showed plenty of signs of unresolved trauma—children William had left behind as a young man, a move away from the United States to Canada, glimmers of experiences of poverty and failed relationships. Yet William was also charismatic, resilient, and, as it turned out, capable of long-term commitment and love.

Those long-neglected tapes become the basis of a moving exploration of what it means to be Black in America, of the patterns that repeat in families even without our awareness, of ties that bind even when we don't understand or perceive them. Guy nurtures connections to a remarkable older sister whom he had not really known, ponders the advantages he had as his father's younger son growing up during his father's ex-

ile in Canada, and connects with the beauty and resiliency of his African American relatives. By the time Guy's stepfather faces a final illness two decades after Guy's father's final illness, Guy is changed, and ready to be present for all of the pain and love and connection that accompanies another momentous passing.

"Our Dad, Danielle," feels like a more awkward film in some ways, but may simply be a more awkward story, trickier to tell at this stage of human evolution. DJ Healey has been married for thirty years to Becky; the two fell hard for each other back in the '80s and lovingly raised two daughters in Sugar Land, Texas, where DJ built a very successful practice as a patent attorney. The love between them feels real—and yet their happiness appeared to depend on DJ hiding her true female self behind suits and a bigger-than-life personality and body and never-ending work.

Finally and awkwardly, DJ comes out as Danielle Joy at age 57. The story of her emergence and its ripples of impact are told mostly by those who love her and those who love those who love her—and the telling sometimes feels like a rough ride. The couple live in the heart of conservative America, and there are lots of moments of misgendering and cringe-inducing questions and reactions. I'd love to know how this story feels to other trans folks and did wonder at times if there might be a better way to tell parts of it.

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