

Documentarian shuns easy answers

By ALISON MACOR
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"I am lying on the floor of a motel room in Odessa, Texas, looking at the face of a man I have never seen before," documentary filmmaker Jan Krawitz tells us in the voice-over that narrates "In Harm's Way," a provocative meditation on Krawitz's 1985 sexual assault. Her voice is flat and deliberate, very different from the voice of the woman who speaks quickly in articulate, whole paragraphs from her parents' home in Pennsylvania.

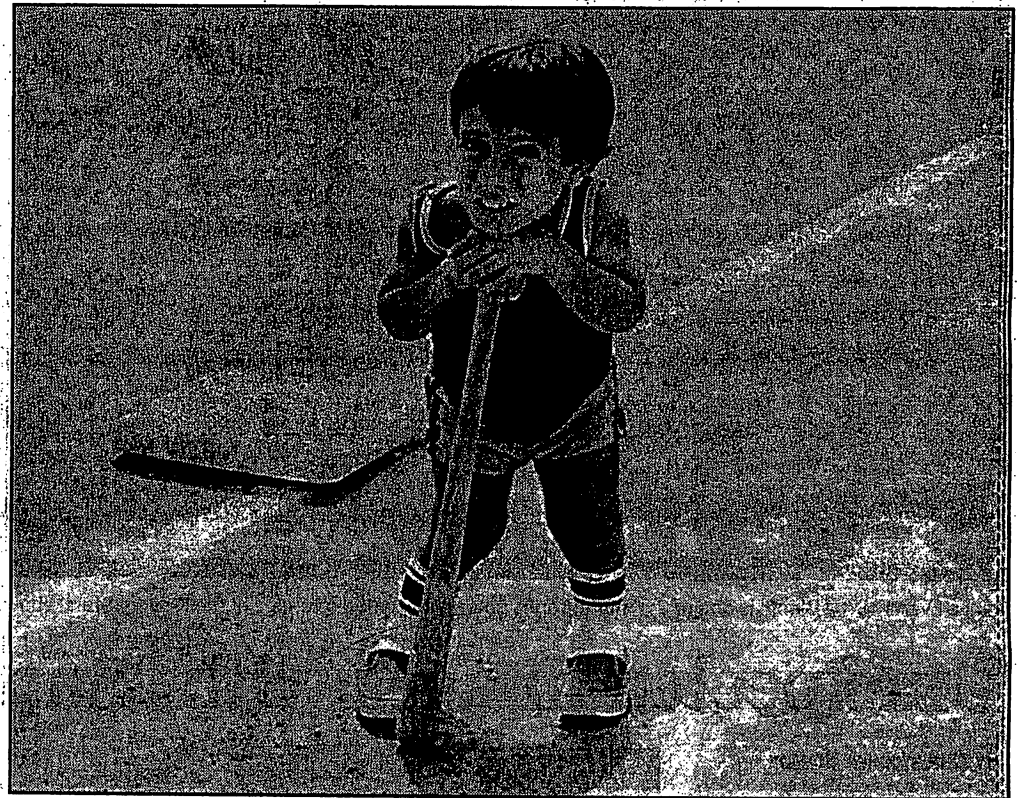
Krawitz and her young son are enjoying a brief vacation before she journeys to Austin to screen "In Harm's Way" and an earlier, award-winning film called "Little People." The documentaries make up this evening's installment of the Texas Documentary Tour at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. It is a homecoming of sorts for Krawitz, who taught production courses at the University of Texas from 1980 to 1988.

"In Harm's Way" explains how the rape reverberated through Krawitz's life. Archival footage contextualizes her childhood growing up during the Eisenhower era and the Cold War paranoia of the 1960s, and her narration of both distances and draws us in as viewers.

"I was never the woman in that film," says Krawitz, referring to the false reality constructed by any kind of photographic representation, even a documentary film. She observes that audiences often struggle with the juxtaposition between the person who they hear on the soundtrack (and the image this suggests) and the woman she is now, nearly 15 years after the attack.

"In Harm's Way" offers no conventional catharsis in the form of a postscript explaining that Krawitz is currently happy in her life as an established professor and documentarian at Stanford University and as a wife and mother. This is the point of the film. "I don't want the audience to feel better about (the assault)," Krawitz says. "People want that. They're so conditioned to Hollywood endings."

Instead, Krawitz structured "In Harm's Way" so that viewers would focus on the event rather than on the perpetrator or his fate. She wrote 21 drafts of the narration that carefully explains how her vision of the world was shattered with a single, random act of violence.



Mark Trombino, 11, is one of the 'Little People' featured in Jan Krawitz's documentary.

"I think there's a certain affect of distance, both in the way I wrote the narration and the way in which I read it. I think that was conscious. I'm also very much in control of the information as it's being observed, and I was very particular in terms of what I did want the audience to know and what I was unwilling to share with them, and what I thought was irrelevant," says Krawitz.

She and co-director Thomas Ott used a similar approach in the 1984 documentary "Little People." An entertaining, often moving film about dwarfs, "Little People" interviews a number of men, women and children and allows them to explain in their own words what it's like to be a little person in an average-sized person's world. Absent from the film are lower-third IDs, which are the explanatory titles often used to identify talking heads in interviews.

"What's to be gained by that?" Krawitz asks when queried about the absence of this documentary convention. "That starts becoming facts or statistics, and we really wanted the film to be more like, 'This is what the person is

'In Harm's Way' and 'Little People' Texas Documentary Tour

When: 7 and 9:30 tonight

Where: Alamo Draft House, 409 Colorado St.

Tickets: \$5 (\$3.50 for Austin Film Society members)

Information: 476-1320

like as a person.' It's really immaterial how old they are or what jobs they have," she says.

"You'll remember them when they come back," says Krawitz of the individuals whose stories make up "Little People." It is a testament both to her and Ott's talents as documentarians and to the people they profile that we do

indeed remember them when they reappear on-screen, not to mention long after "Little People" ends.

It has been more than 15 years since "Little People" premiered at the 25th anniversary convention organized by Little People of America and nearly three years since Krawitz finished "In Harm's Way." She needs more time between projects these days; her personal life and her teaching responsibilities as a supervisor of graduate student films require much of her energy.

After the intense experience of making a documentary as personal as "In Harm's Way," Krawitz is eager once again to shoot films about other people. She has a number of ideas and is uncertain which she'll pursue next, but she is clear about one thing. Inspired by the short films her graduate students turn out each quarter, Krawitz says, "I'm thinking small these days."