

Body & Soul: Diana & Kathy

by [Stephen Simon, The Movie Mystic](#)

Get ready to fall madly in love with two of the most remarkable women ever to be immortalized on film.

Kathy Conour has cerebral palsy and her caregiver for the last thirty-seven years has been and remains Diana Braun, who has Down syndrome.

No, this is NOT a sad story. It is actually much more like a female version of Neil Simon's hilarious ODD COUPLE, with Kathy as Felix and Diana's wonderful sense of humor ruling the day as Oscar. Not to be outdone, Kathy has a sign on her wheelchair that says: "Pat me on the head and I'll bite your hand!" The one emotion you will not experience with these women is self-pity. Neither Diana nor Kathy have any room for anything but optimism in their busy and full lives as activists in the world of human rights for the disabled.

Diana was sent to a state home when she was twelve years old and then to a developmental center when she was nineteen. One of the most poignant motifs throughout the film is Diana's ongoing attempts to reconnect with her mother who couldn't cope with the lifestyle of caring for a daughter with Down syndrome. Through those experiences, Diana developed an intense distaste for the idea of housing people with disabilities such as hers in state-run institutions. When she and Kathy connected with each other, Diana became Kathy's caregiver and they became life-long friends and unpaid lobbyists for their cause.

Traveling their own state of Illinois and even the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C, they regularly lobby their own United States senators and other representatives for more independence for the disabled. Diana served

on the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities and works tirelessly to call attention to the fierce independence that these two women depend on to keep their spirits alive and teeming with hope.

With that as background, the emotion that I kept feeling throughout the film was a deep and profound respect for and admiration for the spirits of these two women.

Just traveling is a major challenge for them, requiring a van that has been adapted for Kathy's wheelchair. Are they fazed by it? Do they get discouraged when even Medicare challenges their activities outside the home? Heck, no!!

Most particularly, they live in a no-whine zone that is inspiring beyond words. NEVER do we hear anything from either Kathy or Diana that bemoans their fate. They absolutely accept

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the hand that nature has dealt to them and they live their lives in gratitude for each other and for what they DO have, with no discussion about what they DON'T have.

It is so striking to watch Diana go through the several hours every day that she needs to spend caring for Kathy and do so with such humor and grace. When she recognizes that she has trouble balancing the household checkbook, she simply asks for help. No self-pity. No "oh-poor-me". She simply calls a friend, says she needs help and offers a home-cooked meal in exchange for some checkbook guidance.

BODY AND SOUL is included in the collection of films that we are sending to our Spiritual Cinema Community in May. Watching Kathy and Diana live their lives often seems like an I-Ching guide to gratitude and appreciation for the gifts most of us receive simply by being in good health. When film

can actually encourage and stimulate transformation, the art form transcends itself. After having seen BODY AND SOUL, I personally feel different. Even using the word "disabled" seems more than a little incongruous when it applies to Diana and Kathy. They seem much more at peace in their own hearts than many able-bodied people, including, I am embarrassed to admit, myself. After watching this film, I resolved to be much more conscious of how fortunate I am and much less conscious of the things that I allow to bother me, most of which seem so petty in comparison to the challenges that Kathy and Diana face every day. I fell completely in love with these two women and I believe that you will, too.

(Stephen Simon co-founded www.spiritualcinemacircle.com. He also produced such films as SOMEWHERE IN TIME and WHAT DREAMS MAY COME. And both directed and produced INDIGO and CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD.)

Body & Soul: Diana & Kathy is part of the Spiritual Cinema Circle DVD collection in May, 2008. For more information please visit www.spiritualcinemacircle.com

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