

# Untitled Films

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## BEFORE YOU KNOW IT

A film by PJ Raval

*Three gay seniors navigate the adventures, challenges and surprises of life and love in their golden years.*



### AWARDS

**WINNER**, Best Documentary - Asian Film Festival of Dallas  
**BEST OF THE FEST**, Cinema Q Presented by Denver Film Society  
**WINNER**, Audience Choice Award - Image + Nation LGBTQ Film Festival  
**WINNER**, Audience Award - Polari Film Festival of Austin  
**WINNER**, Jury Award Best Documentary - Chicago Reeling LGBT Film Festival  
**BUZZ SCREENING**, SXSW International Film Festival  
**NOMINEE**, Best Austin Film – Austin Film Critics Award

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## **SYNOPSIS**

The subjects of the film **BEFORE YOU KNOW IT** are no ordinary senior citizens. They are go-go booted bar-hoppers, love struck activists, troublemaking baton twirlers, late night Internet cruisers, seasoned renegades and bold adventurers. They are also among the estimated 2.4 million lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans over the age of 55 in the United States, many of whom face heightened levels of discrimination, neglect and exclusion.

But **BEFORE** is not a film about cold statistics and gloomy realities, it's a film about generational trailblazers who have surmounted prejudice and defied expectation to form communities of strength, renewal and camaraderie – whether these communities be affable senior living facilities, lively activist enclaves or wacky queer bars brimming with glittered trinkets and colorful drag queens.

- Dennis is a gentle-hearted widower in his 70s who begins exploring his sexual identity and fondness for dressing in women's clothing under the name "Dee."
- Ty is an impassioned LGBT activist who hears nothing but wedding bells once gay marriage passes in New York.
- Robert "The Mouth" is a feisty bar owner who presses on when his neighborhood institution comes under threat.

Born before the Civil Rights era, these men have witnessed unbelievable change in their lifetimes: from the Stonewall Riots and gay liberation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and Queer Nation to gay marriage and Lady Gaga. They have lived to become part of an unprecedented "out" elder generation.

**BEFORE YOU KNOW IT** focuses on the lives of these three vibrant gay seniors, and reminds us that while LGBT elders face a specific set of issues, aging and its challenges are universal.

An affirmation of life and human resilience told with refreshing humor and candor, **BEFORE YOU KNOW IT** confirms that you are never too old to reshape society.



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## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

The inspiration behind *Before You Know It* came in 2008, when I was touring with my last film, *Trinidad*, a feature documentary that follows three transgender women living in the small town of Trinidad, Colo., also known as the "sex-change capital of the world." We were invited to screen in upstate New York, and screenwriter Ron Nyswaner (*Philadelphia*, *Soldier's Girl*) was kind enough to organize a reception afterwards at the Hudson Valley LGBTQ Center in Kingston. At the event there was a good turnout of LGBT community members, and surprisingly enough, they were almost exclusively LGBT *seniors*. At that moment I realized how little I'd seen or heard of them as a community, and I started to question why.

I went around the room and thanked many of them for attending. In return, they shared personal stories with me, stories of living many years in the closet, or witnessing a large portion of their community die off during the AIDS crisis, or even grappling with the fact they've lived long enough to see gay marriage legalized in certain states. At that moment I realized that this particular group of people had seen such a large amount of change during their lifetime. Born before the civil rights movement, they have lived through the sexual revolution and Stonewall and now find themselves in a world where they can see openly LGBT characters on TV and listen to Lady Gaga on the radio. Around the same time, I was a volunteer film instructor to queer youth as young as 14, and I wondered if they were aware of the experiences that their LGBT elders had lived through. I was fascinated by the fact that both age groups were on opposite sides of the spectrum, and that I myself was somewhere in the middle. The LGBT community has recently placed a lot emphasis on supporting our youth, and rightfully so, but what about support for the other highly vulnerable group: our senior communities?

Weeks later I found myself still thinking about this overlooked group of people. I mentioned my experience in Kingston to Sara Giustini, who eventually came on as the producer of this film. Together we started researching the topic and uncovered pretty startling statistics, such as the fact that LGBT seniors are twice as likely to live alone as their heterosexual counterparts, and five times less likely to access social services. Living in a youth-obsessed culture, LGBT seniors face ageism, loneliness and discrimination. Overall, society at large desexualizes seniors, even though someone who identifies as gay is being defined by their sexual identity, making the two terms, "gay" and "senior," seem at odds with one another. Clearly there have always been members of the LGBT community over the age of 65, but we are now seeing the first visible LGBT senior communities. Acknowledging the vulnerability of age and the need for one another, these seniors are organizing and creating their own communities in the form of living facilities, community organizations, bar establishments and so forth. They continue to blaze trails. On a personal note, around this same time, my mother



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and I started having conversations about her thoughts on retiring one day and the financial and emotional challenges involved. As a member of the LGBT community, I wondered what things would be like when I'm over 65. So I set out to make this film to find out for myself.

Initially I thought I'd chosen each character based solely on my interest in wanting to know more about each of them. I was fascinated by Dennis' ongoing journey of self-discovery. I admired Ty's tenacity as a public figure at the forefront of gay visibility in Harlem while wrestling with personal feelings about issues that he never thought he'd see in his lifetime, like the legalization of gay marriage in New York. I enjoyed hearing Robert tell stories of his wild and unapologetic youth and seeing that unique spirit captured in his bar and passed on to the patrons and staff, whom he considered family. But only when we started editing did I realize that I'd chosen each subject because together they formed a life cycle. Each person represents a different stage of life. Dennis' coming out late in life is reminiscent of adolescence and self-discovery/self-acceptance, even at the age of 80. Ty's story of partnership and marriage echoes midlife concerns of settling down and looking toward the rest of one's life. Robert's narrative signifies legacy and a passing of the torch. All three stories are unique and individual, yet together they give us a larger picture of life and aging. Though each individual lives in a different city, with a different history, and encountering different challenges, they have a commonality between them. They are linked to one another.

Filming *Before You Know It* has been a life-changing experience for me. Not only have I met and gotten to know three amazing individuals, but I also marched in the New York Pride Parade the day after gay marriage was legalized in the state of New York. I've been on a gay cruise to the Caribbean! I've experienced my first Mardi Gras in Galveston and sat through my first legal gay wedding. A lot of what the characters experienced I've experienced as well. The moments of surprise, sadness, inspiration, laughs and tears will be with me for the rest of my life. The film is a document of not only the three characters' lives but, in a way, my own experience as the filmmaker.

Though *Before You Know It* looks at aging through the lives of three gay seniors, ageism, loneliness, acceptance and loss are all universal experiences. Not only does it take a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to support an individual who is aging. It's a community effort, and community could be your friends, a bar, a living facility or "family." But aging alone is a difficult process. It's up to everyone of all ages to support the older generations, and it's in all our best interest to do so, as the aging process does not discriminate. Robert eloquently states in the film, "You never think about getting older when you're younger, but before you know it, it creeps up on you, and you're there already." Making this film, I can now say I've now thought about it... and I look forward to seeing you "there."



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## **SUBJECT BIOS**

### **Dennis**

An avid Star Trek fan with a fondness for cross-dressing, Dennis began to explore his sexual identity only after his wife passed away several years ago. He lives a closeted life in rural Niceville, Florida to be close to his family, but for the most part he lives a solitary existence sometimes going weeks at a time without seeing a soul.

The loneliness is at times unbearable and suppressing his true self becomes more difficult. So, Dennis takes gay cruises and vacations, and a few years ago began spending the summers at Rainbow Vista, a LGBTQ retirement community outside of Portland, Oregon. At Rainbow Vista, Dennis lives an open and active lifestyle.

### **Ty**

Born and raised in Harlem, Ty has a deep love for his community, but he also feels disappointment in the homophobia that has firmly taken root in the last thirty years. Ty feels compelled to act- to create a safe place for LGBTQ seniors to socialize and share experiences. As outreach director for Harlem's SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Elders) office, Ty Martin is able to serve the community to which he belongs.

### **Robert**

The son of a Southern Baptist preacher born and raised in Houston, Texas, Robert Mainor always knew he was a "sissy."

In 1970, he and his partner moved to Galveston, a tiny island about an hour away from Houston, where they opened Robert's Lafitte, the self-proclaimed longest running gay bar in Texas. One could always find Robert ruling over this neighborhood institution, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned to his navel and large framed Jerry Lewis glasses. In true southern style, he is a storyteller, entertaining anyone who will listen with tales about Hurricane Ike and the bar's famous drag shows.

Nine years ago, he suffered the first of several heart attacks; needing to rest more and more. Recently, Robert has turned over most of the daily business of the bar to his nephew.



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## **PRODUCTION TEAM**

### **PJ Raval, Director**

Named one of Out Magazine's "Out 100 2010" and Filmmaker Magazine's "25 new faces of independent film 2006," PJ Raval is an award-winning filmmaker whose credits include Trinidad (Winner, Best Documentary Cleveland International Film Festival 2009, Showtime, LOGO), The CHRISTEENE video collection (SXSW), and his latest film BEFORE YOU KNOW IT a documentary about LGBT seniors and aging (SXSW World Premiere, San Francisco International Film Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival).

Raval is also currently developing a feature fiction narrative with acclaimed screenwriter and playwright Prince Gomolvilas and recently directed a segment called "Rantings" as part of the 2011 remake of Richard Linklater's indie classic Slacker.

Also an award-winning cinematographer, Raval's work has earned him awards such as the ASC Charles B. Lang Jr. Heritage Award as well as the Haskell Wexler Award for Best Cinematography. Raval's work includes the 2009 Academy Award-nominated Trouble The Water as well as the Independent Spirit Award-nominated Room. He recently completed the highly anticipated feature The Bounceback directed by Bryan Poyser, which will premiere at SXSW.

In his spare time Raval likes to try and take small naps and pretend he knows ballet.

### **Sara Giustini, Producer**

As a filmmaker Sara Giustini has an affinity for both fact and fiction so she divides her time between documentary and narrative production. Most recently, she served as the project coordinator for the Emmy Award-winning American Experience film Freedom Riders. She was the series associate producer for God in America, a six-hour FRONTLINE and American Experience co-production, which aired nationally on PBS in October of 2010. She co-produced the documentary Trinidad, directed by PJ Raval & Jay Hodges, which premiered at Los Angeles Film Festival and was broadcast on Showtime and LOGO. Giustini also co-produced Nancy Schiesari's Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer, which aired as part of ITVS' inaugural season of Independent Lens. Giustini's other production credits include Matthew Wiener's forthcoming You Are Here (2013), The Surrogates (Disney, 2009), There Will Be Blood (Paramount Vantage, 2007), The Three Burial of Melquiades Estrada (Europa Corp, 2005) and NBC's Friday Night Lights.



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### **Kyle Henry, Editor**

Kyle Henry is an accomplished editor and filmmaker. Henry's most recent film the Emmy winning *Where Soldiers Come From* (directed by Heather Courtney) won Best Editing at SXSW 2011 and was nominated for the Independent Spirit's Truer than Fiction Award. Other editing credits include PJ Raval & Jay Hodges' documentary *Trinidad*, the PBS films *Are the Kids Alright?*, *Troop 1500*, and *Letters from the Other Side*. Henry is the writer/director of the feature film *Room*, which screened at Cannes and Sundance, and the forthcoming *FourPlay*, an omnibus of shorts. *FourPlay: Tampa* screened at Sundance in 2012.

### **Mike Simpson, Director of Photography**

Mike Simpson is an award winning cinematographer who actively balances narrative and commercial work. He shot *Taiwan Oyster*, which premiered in the narrative competition at SXSW in 2012. *Variety* wrote, "The sheer beauty of Simpson's frames often stands in direct contrast with the delirious indulgence on display." He also shot the film *It's In the Blood* starring Lance Henriksen: "We are introduced to images that will haunt us...like the rest of the film the cinematography is darkly beautiful." Simpson also shot *Strings*, a thriller with awards including best cinematography: "I think it is safe to say that Mike Simpson's cinematography is absolutely gorgeous."

Mike's commercial resume includes international TV spots for Nintendo starring Robin Williams as well as beauty and hair spots for Maybelline and Matrix. Other clients include, Budweiser Coach, Seventh Gen., Dell, Whole Foods, and more. Mike's incredible diversity in commercials has produced much blogged about fashion and beauty spots, Adity winners and even New York Times write-ups.

### **Jimmy LaValle, Composer**

Jimmy LaValle, and his musical project The Album Leaf, is best known for his distinctive, dreamy, cinematic soundscapes that have been featured in film, television, commercials, and numerous album, EP and Single releases. The Album Leaf has toured both nationally and internationally. Performances have included Red Rocks Amphitheater in Denver, Colorado; The Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, California; Primavera Sound Festival in Barcelona, Spain; All Tomorrows Parties "I'll Be Your Mirror" Festival, curated by Portishead; Metamorphose Festival in Tokyo, Japan; and national tours of the United States, Mexico, Canada, Europe, China, Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia. LaValle performed a critically acclaimed live score to the 1927 silent film *SUNRISE: A SONG OF TWO HUMANS*, at the 2008 Seattle International Film Festival, and scored the documentary films *TOREY'S DISTRACTION*, which won the Audience Award at the 2009 Austin Film Festival and *Wonder Women! The Untold Story of American Superheroines* that premiered at SXSW in 2012.



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## **FULL CREDITS**

### **Director:**

PJ Raval

### **Producer:**

Sara Giustini, PJ Raval

### **Cinematographer:**

Mike Simpson

### **Editor:**

Kyle Henry

### **Music:**

Jimmy LaValle

Co-Producer Annie Bush  
Associate Producer Curran Nault

2nd Unit Director of Photography Russell Bush  
& Super-8 Footage

Additional Photography Drew Xanthopoulos  
Michael Rossi  
Esy Casey

Visual Effects Olivier Stéphant

Additional Editing Victoria Chalk

Assistant Editors Jessie Dorfman  
Austin Reedy  
Mariana Blanco

Edit Intern Ursula Ellis

Production Assistant (OR) Dave Drusky

Production Assistants (NY) Avram Dodson  
Jess Dela Merced



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Still Photographers Charlotte Marie Wood  
Mike Simpson

Music Supervisor Roanna Gillespie

Story Consultant Mary Lampson

Edit Consultant Jonathan Oppenheim

Project Consultant Bob Hawk

Production Counsel Deena Kalai

Post Production Interns Bobby Hammelman  
Courtney Wiese

Post Production Assistant Katrina De Vera

Distribution Interns Mandy Mullarkey  
Tabetha Webb  
Emily Barbin

Film Lab Alpha Cine

Film Transfer Lightpress

Audio and DI Producer Allison Turrell

Colorist and DI Editor Parke Gregg

Dialogue Editor Nathan Efstation

Re-Recording Mixer Lyman Hardy

Publicity David Magdael & Associates,  
Inc.

Bookkeeping Mary Sullivan

Festival Coordinator Cat Coyne



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