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Berkshire Film Festival June 2 To 5 Features Wampanoag Documentary

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Jessie Little Doe Baird and her daughter, Mae Alice, the first native speaker of Wampanoag in more than 100 years, as seen in the documentary "We Still Live Here."

By SUSAN DUNNE, sdunne@courant.com May 29, 2011

Years ago, Jessie Little Doe Baird started having recurring dreams, of familiar-looking people speaking a language she didn't understand, even though it sounded like something she'd heard before.

"I thought I was getting a little nutty," Baird says.

Later, she saw a street sign with the word "Sippewissett" on it. The light bulb went on, and Baird realized that her dream visitors were speaking Wampanoag, the language of Baird's ancestors.

Later, the dream people told her, in English, "We've got a job here for you if you'll accept it."

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Baird did. Her story is the focus of "We Still Live Here." The documentary by Anne Makepeace follows Baird as she leaves her Cape Cod social work job to become an acclaimed linguist, reviving the Wampanoag language from extinction and teaching tribe

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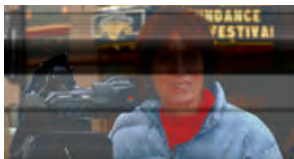
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members to speak their mother tongue.

"We Still Live Here" will be shown Friday, June 3, at 4 p.m. as part of the Berkshire International Film Festival in **Massachusetts**. The festival, which will show 70 features, documentaries and shorts, runs from Thursday, June 2, through Sunday, June 5. Makepeace will be present at the screening.

"I couldn't help but be inspired by what has happened in this community," Makepeace, of the Lakeville section of Salisbury, says. "It's an amazing cultural revival."

Makepeace says **Noam Chomsky**, the legendary linguist based at **MIT**, told her that the Wampanoag revival "has in fact accomplished something [he] thought was impossible.

"The language had died. There had not been one speaker of the language for a century. ... The last speaker died before there were recording devices," she says. "To painstakingly resurrect a language, word by word, is amazing."

The great irony of the revival, Makepeace says, is that it may not have been possible without a Wampanoag-language Bible published in the 17th century.

"It was created by Puritans to convert native people away from their traditional ways and become good Puritans," Makepeace says. "Now it's the Rosetta Stone, bringing their traditional ways back."

Makepeace, 64, has been directing films since 1982 and documentaries since 1998. Previous subjects have included architect I.M. Pei, Somali Bantu refugees, first lady **Eleanor Roosevelt** and legendary photojournalist **Robert Capa**.

"A lot of my films have to do with searching for home and realizing you're already there," she says. "All have cross-cultural elements, collisions or collaborations of people of different cultures."

Makepeace grew up in **Middlebury** and went to school in **Waterbury** (St. Margaret's High School, Class of 1965). After living in **California** for decades — going to school, teaching and then gravitating toward filmmaking — she moved to Salisbury in 2003. She lives there with Charles Church, whom she married last fall, and their chocolate lab, Cassius.

She says she likes documentary filmmaking for its spontaneity and changeability.

"In narrative filmmaking, you get an idea, fall in love with the story, write a script. ... Everything about the production is making a vision you already had come true," she says. "In documentaries, you never know what is going to happen. You don't know what people say or what will come out in the research. ... It's extremely exhausting and draining but also stimulating and a constant challenge."

This even applies to her first documentary, which was about her.

"Here I am making a documentary about wanting to have a baby, and in the middle of it all, my brother decided to become a polygamist and move to **Utah**," she says, laughing. "Truth really is stranger than fiction. You can't make up stuff that happens in the real world."

Other Festival Films

The center of the festival is the Saturday tribute night. This year, the honoree is special-effects whiz Douglas **Trumbull**. In addition to Trumbull's presentation and a screening of his 1983 thriller "Brainstorm" (**Natalie Wood's** last film), the evening will feature a screening of the **drama** that just won the Palme d'Or at the **Cannes Film Festival**, **Terrence Malick's** "**The Tree of Life**," on which Trumbull worked. It stars **Brad Pitt** and **Sean Penn**.

Also this year, the festival teamed with the **Human Rights Watch** Film Festival to present five documentaries on rights issues. These are "Granito: How To Nail a Dictator," about Guatemala; "The Green Wave," about the Iran uprising; "The Team," about a voting controversy in Kenya; "You Don't Like the Truth: 4 Days Inside Guantanamo"; and "Youth Producing Change," a compilation of short films made by teens.

Another Connecticut filmmaker represented at the festival is Cindy Meehl, whose documentary "Buck" tells the story of original horse whisperer Buck Brannaman.

Other docs at the fest include "A Letter to Elia," about filmmaker **Elia Kazan**; "Chasing Madoff," about disgraced financier Bernie Madoff; "Page One: Inside **the New York Times**"; "If A Tree Falls: The Story of the Earth Liberation Front"; and "Never Stand Still," a dance film shot at Jacob's Pillow.

THE BERKSHIRE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL runs from Thursday, June 2, to Sunday, June 5, at various sites, including the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center and Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington and Beacon Cinema in Pittsfield, Mass. The festival also features receptions, award presentations, events with filmmakers and other activities. Details, including a full lineup, venues, schedules and tickets: <http://www.biffma.org> and 866-811-4111.

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